

Prison of the Nation

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A Novel of the Axis Victory and the Stonk Market

Chapter 1

There were three different editions of *The Resettlement of the Eastern Subhumans*, published in 2029, 2059, and 2094. The general narrative of what happened changed little between the editions. The bombs were dropped, free Russia was occupied, a census was taken, identification documents were issued, fingerprints were collected. Bureaucrats in Berlin poured over the numbers and decided which areas of Siberia and Central Asia had “surplus population.” They drew up a deportation schedule. When an area’s time came German troops, sometimes aided by Chinese or Japanese, would descend and bundle off the “surplus” to the ghettos of the European Reich. The editions are all silent on what became of the region’s Jewish population. It is as if this group that supposedly dominated the government vanished into thin air the moment Free Russia surrendered. While the narrative of the actions did not change between editions, the narrative of the thoughts changed radically. In the first edition, the Berlin bureaucrats were planning for one wave of deportations, considered complete by the time the book was published. In the third edition, the reader is supposed to believe that the planners foresaw the industrial decline of Siberia and the second era of mass deportation from 2045 to 2065.

Despite its propagandistic nature, the libraries of the North Kyiv Ghetto purchased many copies of *Resettlement*, as it was the closest thing to a “history” its people were permitted to have. The first, second, and third editions sat side-by-side on the shelves. The regime did not attempt to remedy the situation by removing the outdated editions. That would be too obvious, too heavy-handed. Instead, it produced only the latest edition and counted on time to make the others go away. Libraries would run out of space on the shelves. Old books would be discarded to make room for new ones.

That was what was supposed to happen, but something different was happening in the North Kyiv Ghetto. The first and second editions had already been scanned, downloaded to flash drives, and placed in storage. The third, one year old in 2095, would join them soon. Toma Jansky was twenty-nine years old, with short blond hair, brown eyes, light skin, no facial hair, and a broad, Slavic face. He wore a white, short-sleeved shirt and a hairnet. He turned a page of the third edition, flipped the book over, pressed it against the photocopier, and pushed the button to copy. Turn page. Press down. Copy. Turn page again. And on. He had tried to convince himself he enjoyed the work, which gave him a break from the intellectually demanding tasks that occupied most of his days. But it was of little use. The job was tedious,

repetitive, but, he hoped, would be worth it in the end.

Jansky came to the photographic insert that marked the rough halfway point in the book and decided to take a break. He sat down in his chair, one of three in the bunker, his back aching from the repetitive motion. He held up *Resettlement* and stared at the pictures. He had seen them before and it appeared they were unchanged from the previous editions. Nine of them showed his ghetto, North Kyiv, under construction and receiving its first civilian deportees. By then ghetto building had been standardized by *Organisation Todt*, whose professional construction workers supervised teams of POWs to mass-produce *plattenbau*. Construction took place over the spring and summer of 1973. The first civilian inmates arrived that August, deportees from the city of Khabarovsk in the Russian Far East. The photos showed the deportees arriving with plain, shell-shocked looks. One would reason there would have been weeping, but if any such photos were taken, they did not make their way into *Resettlement*.

The bunker was a quiet place, though Jansky could faintly hear the sounds of activity from the Zoning Department office above. As he sat there alone, he thought back to the fantasies he had when he was fourteen years old. He had imagined a whole underground city beneath the ghetto, a complex of interconnected bunkers. There were entrances at the high school, at his apartment building, and at the Yamel Tower, the ghetto's seat of government. The rooms were large, carpeted, air-conditioned, and impeccably clean, decorated in modern or hyper-modern style. The old Russian flags hung confidently on the walls. There were libraries full of the destroyed Russian literature, printed in the old Cyrillic script. And, this being a teenage fantasy, the bunkers were full of alcohol and pretty teenage girls, the atmosphere being that of a never-ending party. Those who ran the bunkers were some kind of elite, but they were different from the elite that seemed to run the ghetto, those punctilious business suits. They only let that group appear to run things. The real elite would "choose" the young Toma Jansky, recognize his superiority to his peers, and invite him to come and go as he pleased. He, and everyone else who went to the underground city, would do so with no fear of being discovered by the *Kripo* and sent to a concentration camp.

The teenaged Toma Jansky did know it was a fantasy. He knew that there was no "hidden elite," that the people who seemed to run the ghetto did run the ghetto, and that they had no interest in building bunkers. They were rule-followers, businessmen, not poets, scholars, historians, or political activists. When Andriy Vashchenko created an underground newspaper, they reasoned that such a thing was stupid and reckless, so they sent in the ghetto police to have him bundled off to a camp. Jansky, like many of his peers, had been outraged, though not enough to take any rebellious action. By the end of his teenage years, he had moved away from this mode of thinking, believing the police were right to arrest Vashchenko. What intellectual life existed in the ghetto would have to abide by the strictures imposed by the *Kripo*, designed

to return it to a medieval state. One could meet, one could discuss, but one could not write or publish. He expected to become a computer programmer and live a comfortable middle-class life, with the elite world, whatever its nature, inaccessible to him.

Then, on July 11, 2084, a decision made in Berlin shook the foundations of the North Kyiv Ghetto. Suddenly the elite world did not seem so distant. He walked up to the elite world's skyscraper, walked into the first level and began climbing, slowly but surely. Eventually, he came to meet Yuri Maslak, a member of the elite who smiled on him and invited him to join his intellectual club, the Glanzia Forum. One year prior, he showed Jansky the bunker secretly built beneath the Yamel Tower. It was very far from the world he had fantasized about. The bunker was a single concrete cube, bare and undecorated, containing an overhead fluorescent light, a desk with a computer monitor and photocopier, three chairs, a couch, and many file cabinets that were gradually being filled with flash drives and the most important books and documents. Poor ventilation would prevent more than a few people from partying there and all would have to be careful not to make noise. And, unlike in his fantasy, Jansky wore a hairnet and was careful to wipe his fingerprints when he went to the bunker.

The bunker was meant to be a "time capsule" for Jansky's descendants. There were scans of documents like *Resettlement*, propaganda that might change in the far future. There were documents detailing how the ghetto wall worked, how goods moved through the ghetto checkpoints, how *Kripo* inspectors searched for contraband, and the locations and resolutions of the security cameras. There were scans of works like *The Sociology and Economics of the Eastern Subhuman Ghettos*, a rather dry book produced by the regime that detailed the typical ghetto wage rates, rents, education and training levels, etc. There was also a book written by Jansky's co-conspirator, the librarian Ivan Vinov, entitled *The Russians of North Kyiv*. It recorded aspects of ghetto life the regime found uninteresting, things like the tensions between the social classes in the ghetto, the people's view of their American and Indian employers, and how they saw gender and sexuality. There were deadly-serious accounts of *Kripo* raids along with explanations of humorous shibboleths that would never make it into the Reich Encyclopedia, phrases like "Socrates was a n*gger" and "Lincoln was a Nazi."

Jansky himself was working on a project detailing the ghetto's early years, entitled *Prison of The Nation: The First "Easterners" in North Kyiv*. It was based on photocopies of diaries preserved by some unknown individual or group, providing the Russian perspective on the deportations wholly missing from books like *Resettlement*. Before he began the project, he could learn about the ghetto's first decades in two ways: by reading Nazi propaganda and by asking those older than him what they, in turn, were told by their elders. There were still people in the ghetto who were born in the year 2000, who grew up among people who lived through the 1970s. But this

collective memory was inevitably biased by hindsight; the diaries were not. It took some time before he could read them. The learning curve started with him learning the old Cyrillic script. He then taught himself how to read and understand Ukrainian, with the added difficulty that the Ukrainian diarists mostly didn't write in standard dictionary Ukrainian but a particular dialect that was the product of ongoing Russification. He fumbled through the confusion of traditional Slavic naming customs, with full, short, and pet names, sex-based inflection, and surnames that predated the Nazi rationalization decree, "Likhachyov" rather than "Linov." But after months of difficulty, he learned to read comfortably and began to immerse himself in the diarists' world. He knew he had succeeded when he had to consciously avoid using archaisms in everyday conversation.

About two-thirds of the diarists were deportees from "free Russia," the rest were local Russians and Ukrainians who had lived under Nazi rule since 1941. Those from free Russia had grown up believing that the "free powers" of Russia, Britain, and the United States had overwhelming superiority, that if Himmler was mad enough to launch the nukes, Germany would be reduced to rubble. When Russia surrendered, they couldn't quite believe they had lost. This led to undue optimism. When the occupiers set up "pillars," many convinced themselves it was the first step toward Slovakia-style autonomy. The deportations ended the delusions, with many dryly noting that the Jews, too, had been given "pillars" before they were all eventually killed, though the Dutch word "pillar" had not been used until the 1960s.

Jansky described the deportees as having gone through a three-stage process. After the initial wave of denial, the deportees accepted that they and their descendants would be a permanent helot-class. The initial desire to escape the ghetto and join local Ukrainian peasants or return to Siberia evaporated as it was clear that conditions in Siberia and the Ukrainian countryside were no better than in the ghettos. But beginning around 1990, the situation in North Kyiv began to change. German engineering companies set up shop outside the ghetto, looking to exploit the pool of cheap talent. Soon they began recruiting skilled workers from other ghettos and from the so-called "free zones" of Siberia. A new prosperity arose in the ghetto, but many refused to recognize it. One diarist mocked his friend's prediction that the original *plattenbau* would all eventually be demolished. He probably lived to see the day when the last eight-story *plattenbau* was replaced by the twenty-story variety. If he lived long enough, he might have seen the twenty-story buildings start getting demolished and replaced by buildings like Yamel, forty-nine stories tall. In addition to standard pessimistic bias, the refusal to accept the situation may have been a response to the fact that behind those engineering companies was often the Nazi state. Russian engineers helped design the cameras and drones, fingerprint readers and eye scanners and DNA testing machines used to control their descendants.

One thing that surprised Jansky was how prescient the diarists were in

predicting the failure of Himmler's "Generalplan Ost." But this was less impressive than it first appeared, as the idea dated back to prewar Russian propaganda, which made much of Germany's relatively low fertility rate, barely above two in the 1960s. Though they predicted that Germans would not settle the East in large numbers, none came close to predicting the mass immigration of "Reich subjects" who would come in their place, Chinese, Indians, French, Italians, and Americans. The Americans who would come to form the large majority in the Kyiv area west of the Dneiper were regarded as temporary migrants who would inevitably go "home."

The diaries had other surprises for Jansky. He was struck by how many diarists still thought of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians as separate ethnicities. Striking, too, was the level of religiosity. Perhaps one-quarter of the diarists were devoutly religious, in a sense that went way beyond ethnopolitical identity. They thought the deity was ever-present in their lives, watching them and caring about their behavior but for some inexplicable reason never initiating contact. There was much family tension when parents were religious and children were not. It was easy to see why later generations did not want to remember this pointless struggle. Most depressing for Jansky was the discovery that the early years were not a time of unity, solidarity, and lack of class division. If there was a period where there were no social classes, it evaporated in months when the ghetto police established themselves as the first aristocracy, to be supplanted later by businessmen.

The first diary entry was dated sometime in 1943. The final entry was dated December 9, 2021. A day later, *Führer* Georg Langer ordered the so-called "December Purge." "Subhumans" were thereafter forbidden from writing anything of "intellectual value." Anything they had written had to be turned over to the Kripo. The process intended to destroy the records wound up preserving them, as someone within the ghetto police photocopied the diaries before handing them over. For decades they sat somewhere, quite possibly unread. At some point they were moved to the bunker, constructed in 2079.

Jansky decided that break time was over and resumed photocopying *Resettlement*. After he finished, he went on to the next book, *A New History of the North African Campaign*. He hadn't read it but knew it got good reviews in the Nazi press. As he was flipping pages, scanning, and flipping pages again, he heard the sounds of someone else descending into the bunker. A shiver went down his spine, but he told himself not to worry. As far as he knew, three people other than himself knew about it. The man who was descending was the man who built it, Yuri Maslak. Maslak, aged fifty-five and slightly overweight, climbed down with some difficulty, though Jansky knew better than to offer to help him.

Maslak had short, brownish-grey hair, brown eyes, moderately tanned skin, and a broad, Slavic face. On occasion, he joked that he was of Caucasian descent, "like Stalin," though he admitted his ancestors were as far as he knew

only Russian and Ukrainian. He was a member of the twelve-person “Pillar Council” that governed the ghetto and was Director of the Zoning Department. Sometimes people said his Zoning Department office was the most powerful in the ghetto, though he served at the pleasure of the President and could be removed at any time. Jansky knew how he ought to see Yuri Maslak. The Great Man starts his day discussing governance with the ghetto’s old-money elites. Then he spends the afternoon inspecting a building site, where he dons a hardhat and eats canned fish and instant noodles with the workers. Then he meets with the ‘new money’ ‘nerds’ of the Glanzia Forum, where he discusses cognitive biases, decision theory, and futurology and is the first-among-equals despite his aristocratic background. The next day, he leaves the ghetto to talk with the wealthy Americans and Indians of the Kyiv Business Association, who forget the fact that he is a “subhuman” who wears the “OST” (“Easterner”) badge.

This was how Maslak viewed himself, and it was not wholly delusional. He had a certain political talent; his position of prominence could not be reduced to an inevitable outcome of his ‘noble’ birth. But he was also less intelligent than he supposed. To use a German expression, he was a *Besserwisser*, know-it-all, whose mind was full of trivia and misinformation, who would never converse with another person without having a long-winded speech about some subject prepared for the occasion, and who would not tolerate disagreement. But Jansky couldn’t say he disliked the man, for Yuri Maslak had been very good to him.

As Maslak made the last step and stood on the concrete floor of the bunker, he smiled, breathing in the bunker air as if it was his private preserve. He wore his usual attire, a black business suit with no tie. “How are you?” he asked.

“I’m good,” Jansky replied. “I’m nearly done with this batch of books. Vinov and I got a hundred down here. I’ve been scanning them, after which I’ll bring them out in batches. If anyone wonders why I am carrying three or four weighty nonfiction books around, well, I’ll confess to a desire to signal my intelligence.”

Maslak smiled. “Good, good,” he said. “How’s the main project?”

“I’d say I’m nearing the halfway point on it, and I’m re-reading some of the diaries. Most are rather boring, ordinary, but a few have a lot of insight. Some can be called literary works.”

“And your day job?”

“Great. I’ve been very impressed by Orlov, Egorov, and the Semkos, how bright they are,” he said, not really meaning it.

“The others, they have no suspicions?”

“I’ve seen no hint of any suspicions. It’s not like I do drastically less work than them.”

Maslak didn’t look surprised. “Nobody suspects anything, not even your wife?”

“She doesn’t suspect a thing,” Jansky said, being not quite as certain as he made himself out to be. “I must say, though,” he said, “that the diaries don’t always portray our people in the best light.”

“It doesn’t surprise me. I’ve noticed that your generation is far more polite than we were in my day. Yours is the first to grow up without child labor. Poverty may or may not lead to criminality, but no one can deny it breeds rudeness.”

“My father used to tell me, power corrupts, but what is even more corrupting? Powerlessness.”

“He’s right.”

“How should I write about this?”

“Tell the truth.”

“All of the truth, even the, shall we say, moral disorder?”

“Yes. If there are pronographic details in those diaries, you can include them if you want. We needn’t see ourselves as angels. The Germans sure don’t.” He smiled as if to indicate a certain bravery in his willingness to see the flaws in his people. “I like the fashion choice,” Maslak said, smiling in reference to his hairnet.

“Yeah, I’m used to it, so I forget it’s there,” Jansky said. While Maslak would be powerless to explain away a secret bunker in his own office, he was not directly connected to it, so took more precautions.

“It gets no objection from me. Do you think I should try and have the cameras removed from the front hallway?”

Jansky thought from the tone of voice that it was an unserious suggestion. “No, better to hide in plain sight,” he said.

“I agree. I am often asked if the paucity of cameras in this building is for, you know, and I always say no, it’s because of the expense. I am consistently surprised at how many seemingly intelligent people think every camera leads directly to the Kripo and was put there at the behest of the Kripo, and then ask why the Kripo doesn’t put them everywhere. I explain the concept of bandwidth to them and they don’t seem to get it. The *dilettante* occasionally talks about “jailhouse Earth.” My hope is that they won’t care about what goes on in the ghetto enough to take on all those installation, electricity, maintenance, and data storage costs.”

The *dilettante* was one of the insulting names Maslak used for Anton Linov, the President of the Pillar Council. “I wouldn’t have taken this project if I believed the scenario was likely,” Jansky said.

“You’re motivated by the belief that others will, someday, read your work, perhaps in this very room?”

“Yes. I mean, they probably won’t be here when reading it, but they’ll have access to the physical diaries. It’s like the Talmud, or what the Nazis claim is the Talmud, how you’ll read a bit of commentary, then another person replying to the commentary, then a third person saying, the first person’s right on this, but the second person’s right on this. It may seem like

they are in the same room, but they are separated by centuries. We cannot be novelists, academics, newspaper editors. The closest thing is what I am up there, a financial analyst writing reports on company financials and the stonk market. We can't distribute anything through space, but we can through time. And that's what I hope to achieve here. There will be a long line of people, filling up those cabinets with our intellectual output," he said.

"I have the same vision," Maslak said. He looked around, saw the copy of *Resettlement* in front of Jansky, and picked it up. "Have you read this?"

"I read the second edition some time ago and I leafed through the third. Not only will I photocopy it, I also intend to compare its claims to what's in the diaries to see how accurate it is."

"And how accurate *they* are?"

"Yes, source criticism must go both ways."

"Have you found any material for comparison? I don't imagine it goes much into the Russian perspective."

"More than you might think. It goes into a lot of detail about when the Russians first realized they were to be deported, when the cities were blocked off, how many evaded deportation, things like that. There's an obvious bias from the author, who wanted to present the operation as being a well-oiled machine. As I've been reading the diaries, I've taken down the rough dates of when the people realize they are to be deported, when the cities were blockaded, etc. Broadly speaking, they match with the narrative of *Resettlement*."

Maslak looked impressed. He turned to *Resettlement* and began leafing through it. "I was going to say that I'd like to show your book to my son, Osip. Give him some perspective on his own problems. I guess I could show him this, but hell, he's not the reading type. Your children, how are they?"

"Well, some people talk about the terrible twos. Nora and I talk about the terrible fours."

"Yeah, but she's four. Brain's the size of a chimp. You can't blame her."

"Is it really," Jansky said, attempting to look impressed, though he knew the claim was not true. *Infants* had chimp-sized brains. Toddlers' were much larger. "Would certainly explain a lot. You think Osip will grow out of it?"

"No," Maslak said, with a tone of resignation and seeming indifference. "He likes to use this word, princeling. Yana and Tima use it too, but only in a self-deprecating or humorous way. He uses it as if it's an official title. I've told him that to benefit from nepotism there is a floor of competence you have to meet. You can be mediocre but not a complete moron. It seems to go in one ear and out the other."

"It's a sucky situation all around," Jansky said. He wished he had something more insightful to say, but it wasn't as if he, a twenty-nine-year-old, could give any credible advice on the subject.

They continued to converse as Maslak asked fewer and fewer questions and went on longer and longer monologues about his childhood, his children,

and his relationships with his employees. He was not a man to accept the world as it is, always going on about why couldn't it be better, why couldn't he have better kids, better employees, etc. This was common in Jansky's conversations with Maslak. First, they'd converse about something of interest to both, then Maslak would start his monologue. Jansky paid only enough attention to make the occasional comment while he allowed his mind to wander. He snapped out of his daydreams just as Maslak was about ready to leave.

"Oh, and one more thing," Maslak said. "You know Juliet Perot?"

"Yes, you've told me about her."

"I think you should meet her. She's not officially a member of the KBA. But we need her, you know," Maslak said.

Jansky smiled. "From your tone of voice, one would think meeting her is a bit of a chore."

"Yeah, basically. If she decides she likes you, she'll be nice. If she decides she doesn't like you, she won't be nice. But if she isn't nice, it isn't because you're a *Russki*. That's just her natural personality."

"Anything in particular that I should do or say? Sacred cows I shouldn't slaughter?"

Maslak had a look of contemplation for a few seconds. "No," he said. "Just be yourself. I mean, within reason. Be the person you are at the Glanzia Forum meetings."

"Alright," Jansky said. "When and where?"

"Would a week from Tuesday work, seven o'clock?"

"Yes."

"Alright, I'll tell her to expect you at her office, fourth floor, number 14. At the ballroom there's going to be some kind of party for some medical industry big shot. I'll have the KBA 'invite' you to attend, but in actuality, you'll meet with Perot in her office instead. I'll be at the party too, but I think one subhuman is enough for the occasion. And I know you are, how shall I put it, bearish on the power of medicine?"

"Bearish implies a feeling. I can cite studies; medicine isn't nearly as effective as people say it is. I've learned not to say this as people don't like to hear it."

"Then how do I know?" Maslak asked, smiling.

"I know when I talk to you; you want to hear the truth," Jansky said, hoping Maslak would find it flattering. "Most people associate medical skepticism with those too poor to afford it or too stingy to want to spend the money on it. They think of it as sour grapes. You know that's not me. But anyway, I look forward to meeting Perot." He got out a small piece of paper and wrote down the date, time, and location.

"Alright," Maslak said, smiling. "As to it, well, I won't mince words; I hope she likes you but it's no big deal if she doesn't," he said. He then got up to leave. "Keep up the good work."

Jansky smiled as he watched Maslak ascend the ladder. Excepting the Germans of the Kripo, Juliet Perot was the last major figure in the Kyiv Business Association that Jansky had yet to meet. For the most part, the ‘suits’ weren’t particularly interested in Jansky. But they knew Maslak was his protégé and potential successor, the man who may someday have the job of assuring them that everything is alright in the ghetto.” He thought about everything he had learned in the two years since he had known Maslak and been a member of his club, the Glanzia Forum. He had long known organizations like the KBA existed in every large city. They allowed groups of “first-tier” corporations to collude and prevent rent for office space from rising too high. But he wouldn’t have thought that subhumans would be involved as anything more than servants.

He remembered his first “KBA party” quite vividly. It was held to celebrate some kind of triumph in the genetics program. He and Maslak put on their badges, exited at the ghetto checkpoint, and walked a few blocks to the Harren Insurance building. They walked to the second floor and came face to face with a tough-looking American guard. The guard must have recognized Maslak, as he let them through without saying a word. They saw a series of grand columns, behind which was a large foyer where a party was being held. But instead of going to the foyer, Maslak led Jansky sideways through a hallway and into a stairwell. They then walked up to the third-floor hallway, devoid of people, and into a “theatre box” that gave them a good view of the foyer below.

The largest part of the foyer was covered with people in business suits talking in small groups. Most were men; a few were women. About 70% were American, 20% were Indians from across the Dnieper, the rest were a scattering of other “Reich subject” groups, including East Asians and Latin Americans. At the back was a stage with a microphone that was then unoccupied, behind which was a giant Nazi flag. On the left side of the foyer, partitioned by a series of black stanchions, were the big shots sitting around large tables. Jansky recognized Marcus Brecher, the American who was “mayor” of Kyiv, seated at the same table as Gautam Varadkar, the leader of the Indian Pillar in the Kyiv *Reichsgau*. “The Gauleiter,” Maslak had said, “sometimes sits down there.” Also in the prominent section were the Germans of the Kripo, easily distinguishable by their black uniforms.

Jansky was nervous, worrying someone would jump out of the darkened hallway and demand to know what “subhumans” were doing there. Maslak, looking happy and proud of himself, told him not to worry. They wouldn’t go to the foyer then, that would be improper, but after the party began to wound down could meet with leading American officials in the “game rooms” on the fourth floor. Undoubtedly the KBA could do its job in influencing rents. The question Jansky was still asking himself a year later was what influence, if any, did the businessmen of the KBA have on the men of the Kripo?

Every couple of years, the Kripo launched a “raid” on the ghetto. The

checkpoints would be closed and the resident Kripo policemen would be reinforced by soldiers flown in from Germany. The police and soldiers would march into the ghetto and search buildings at random. Around a dozen people would be shot by trigger-happy policemen or soldiers. The KBA Businessmen would hope and pray that the closure of the ghetto only lasts one day. It would be very beneficial if the Kripo men could, in return for the champagne and sushi, convince their superiors to send the raiding party to some other ghetto this year. Maslak, with his inside knowledge of the ghetto, could help by warning of incidents that could give the Kripo pretext to launch a raid.

That was one narrative, and Jansky did find it believable. He had never spoken with the Kripo men, but they were humans like anyone else. Some of them, he presumed, saw all non-Germans as resources to be squeezed dry. If the “degenerate” Americans and “racially inferior” Indians offered a German a gift, it must be a self-interested attempt at manipulation. The German ought to take the gift, enjoy the gift, and then threaten the inferiors with bribery charges if they ask for reciprocation. But the majority responded differently. The Reich subjects were giving gifts to them. They were sucking up to them. They were behaving as subject people should. All they’re asking for is a few phone calls. Why not lend them a hand?

Yet even if the Kripo men wanted to help, it didn’t mean they could. Perhaps there was a computer program at Berlin’s SiPo headquarters that randomly chose ghettos for raids, with no input from local policemen allowed. There would always be pretexts to find. No matter how heavy the penalties were, crime in a ghetto of millions can never go to zero; there will always be some crazy man lashing out. There was nothing to be done to stop Kripo raids. Yet they were still a problem for those KBA businessmen, and that is where action bias, the mother of all biases, came in. There is a problem. I need to show my boss that I care about the problem. I can’t look like I’m just sitting around doing nothing. I must do something. Ideally, something that works, yes, but the most important thing is to demonstrate that I took action. And here’s an excuse to throw parties and put them on the company tab. This is perfect. I’ll present it to my boss, get his sign-off so I’ll have less blame if something goes wrong, and hey, maybe it actually will work.

Theoretically, one could draw some conclusions from a statistical analysis of Kripo raids. Does the frequency of raiding scale with a ghetto’s population? Do some ghettos experience a greater-than-average number of raids to a degree that cannot be explained by random chance? Do raids seem to happen randomly and independently, as in a Poisson process, or is a ghetto that just experienced one less likely to experience another for some time afterward? But because Kripo raids are only covered on local news stations and only a few high-profile raids are detailed in the Reich Encyclopedia, the data to do such an analysis does not exist. Vinov had recorded, for the time capsule, the dates of Kripo raids on North Kyiv and on the “main Kyiv Ghetto” to the south. One could imagine going from ghetto to ghetto

collecting data, but the risk of something reporting this to the Kripo would be too high to be worth doing.

Whichever narrative was correct, it was to Jansky's advantage to appear to believe KBA could influence the Kripo, and that was what he resolved to do. He resumed scanning, working for about twenty minutes. After finishing, he took *Resettlement* and three more books with him. He put on his rubber gloves, wiped his fingerprints, climbed the ladder out of the bunker and saw a faint green LED telling him there was no one in Maslak's closet. He then moved the wall over a foot, squeezed through the open gap, then moved it back. He looked through the second peephole in the closet itself and saw nobody in Yuri Maslak's office. He exited into it, removed his gloves and hairnet, then walked into the hallway.

The "private section" of the Zoning Department contained two offices for Maslak and his deputy, Koloda Sorokin. There was also a table for meetings and a foosball table, couch, and television. Jansky could hear faint sounds from behind the door that connected the private section to the sea of worker bees in cubicles outside. Earlier, he had walked through that sea of cubicles, keyed into the office with his special "guest" key, and called for Maslak, who set the door to only open to the four conspirators: himself, Sorokin, Jansky, and the librarian Ivan Vinov. Despite these precautions, Jansky could not eliminate the irrational fear someone would be in the private section of the office, demanding to know how he sprouted out of nothing.

He told himself to suppress this fear. Jansky had worked on the project for nearly a year. Some of the worker bees had come to recognize him, who they probably knew as an unnamed young blond man who was a member of Maslak's camarilla. Perhaps they thought he was Maslak's son or nephew. Perhaps they wondered what he was doing still in the office after Maslak had left. Maybe they thought he was just sitting alone and watching TV, having gone there to escape his workplace or to get away from his wife. In any case, nobody's hypothesis would come close to the reality. The only thing that would strike an outsider as strange was the fact that the "private section," unlike most executive offices, was located interior to the building, having no windows. Perhaps the worker bees joked this was to enable Maslak or Sorokin to carry out affairs, though they would have noticed if women were coming and going. The grunts who built the bunker under Maslak's supervision probably told the same jokes.

Jansky sat down on the couch and silently admired the area. It was decorated unremarkably, with cliché paintings of mountain scenes and a large portrait of President Linov, a handsome man everyone said had gotten plastic surgery. Toma Jansky could imagine himself running the place someday, overseeing the worker bees outside. Someone had to inherit the bunker, and as far as he knew, he was one of four who knew about it, the others being Koloda Sorokin and Ivan Vinov. Maslak didn't like Vinov all that much and he didn't seem to trust his children, so Jansky sometimes toyed with the idea

that he was third in line to inherit the Zoning Department Directorship, the bunker, and Maslak's position on the Pillar Council. But just as he had to avoid using archaisms from the diaries, he had to avoid giving anyone outside the four conspirators any hint that he thought this was likely. Without the bunker, he was merely a man who had impressed Maslak and got a good but not massively important job through him. And anyway, it was possible more people knew about the bunker than just him, Sorokin, and Vinov; it was also possible that Maslak would seal the capsule and leave whoever becomes the next Zoning Department director in ignorance of its existence. Also, Maslak may not be able to choose his successor. That will be up to whoever is president when Maslak reaches the mandatory retirement age of sixty-five. Maslak knew of this possibility and had told Jansky of his plan to 'seal' the time capsule, leaving it for potential discovery many centuries in the future.

Jansky got up and got his black business suit out of his bag. He put it on, attached his red tie, and then walked out of the private section. As expected, none of the worker bees paid him any attention. He continued out into the "waiting room" and saw the faces of the people waiting there. Some looked emotionless, a few plain. It was a real rarity to see happy people there. He continued out into the tower's lobby, heading back to his day job as a financial analyst at Dador Capital. He walked over to the elevator and waited to ascend to the firm's forty-third-floor office. As he boarded, he grasped at his empty right pocket and felt a brief jolt of fear, then remembered he had left his cell phone in the office to avoid creating a record for the Kripo.

Jansky got off the elevator and walked to Dador's office. The top floors of the Yamel Tower were occupied mainly by financial firms. Some bought companies and looked for fat to trim. Others sold complicated financial products, insurance, derivatives, and prediction market options. Others sold "active management," purporting to be able to "beat the market." Most focused their efforts within the segregated capital markets of the Russian sector. Dador Capital was different: it purported to operate across the boundaries of the ghetto, from which it claimed its market advantage. As its clients were Americans, Dador didn't need a large office in the ghetto to impress them. The door Jansky keyed into was plain wood rather than glass, partly to hide the office's small size. The meeting area he walked through was tiny, with a plain black table and six black plastic chairs, where the firm's five ghetto-based employees met, ate, and argued. Mostly the employees worked in their small private offices, separated from the rest of the office by glass walls. The three more prominent employees had offices with outside windows; Jansky's did not, being covered by glass walls on two sides and bare concrete on the others. In Jansky's office was his desk, large computer monitor, and many photos of his family. The other employees could see him staring into the computer monitor but could not see what he was doing, giving him the privacy to work on his project.

Outside the ghetto was the firm's main office, where its owner and

founder, Dylan Foster, sold the firm's product to his American clients. Foster, if one believed him, was born in 2039 to a middle-class family in the North American *Gau* of Kansas. He was the star pupil in school and earned a scholarship to the elite Thomas Wirth University in the Kyivan suburb of Zhytomyr. After graduation, he settled in the "51st State." He recruited wealthy American clients on the golf courses of the Kyiv area, where he mimicked their culture to an extent that his humble background could be an asset rather than a liability. He was aided in this by his son-in-law, Robert Pearson. His strategy varied. For duller clients, he delivered buzzword-laden speeches about "innovation" and "arbitrage." To smarter ones, he shared the firm's supposed business model.

Subhumans were not permitted to manage non-subhumans; likewise, they could not own stock in any company that did, creating a segmentation of the capital market. Among other inefficiencies, this created a situation where Russian employees in American-owned firms could not trade on inside information directly. Dador, as it is American-owned, could, and thus could theoretically beat the market. And the theory was all Dador sold. It didn't really do it. But that wasn't to say that the employees had no work. There had to be a Russian section, which had to produce reports about the companies they supposedly investigated and shorted.

Alya Semko was the lead financial analyst and the head of the Russian section. She was fifty-two years old and quite pretty. When she joined the firm as a young woman, her shtick was that she could flirt with men and get them to reveal inside information. Now, she was supposedly a popular elder stateswoman among the ghetto's "new money" elite. She was aided by two slightly younger men, Lazar Orlov, age forty-nine, and Vladimir Egorov, age forty-eight. Orlov was a financial analyst while Egorov was a lawyer, theoretically specializing in finding ways around non-disclosure agreements. The firm's fifth employee was Alya Semko's twenty-five-year-old son Maxim, paid a pittance to serve as his mother's secretary but with a brighter future presumably planned.

When Jansky got the job, he expected many questions about Dador. How many employees does it have? Who founded it and when? Does it succeed mainly because of personal connections? Who are the 'investors,' and how did it attract them? What do you *do* day-to-day? But he found that nobody was interested in any of it. Dador was a 'hedge fund' (not actually, but he rarely corrected people), so people thought of it as part of that constellation of rich banking companies that seem to have always existed, have always made (too much) money, have always had help from others in the constellation, have always attracted investors easily, have always been unmeritocratic and will never go bankrupt. The only question that interested people was the question of how Jansky got the job.

To some, he said he simply applied for it; having had a high position in another firm ("Deputy Chief Technology Manager"), he didn't need any

special favors. To those close to him, he admitted that it was because he, like all the Russian employees, was a member of the Glanzia Forum, where he met Alya Semko. Nobody other than Maslak, Sorokin, and Vinov knew that part of the deal was that Jansky would use the job as a cover to write his book. Semko knew he had some secret job for Maslak but did not know what it was.

Jansky picked up his phone and was happy to see that he had not received any work-related emails. He then opened his desk and got out the laptop he used for his project. It was a silver-colored *Deutsche Rechner* 105 model, nine years old. It was not quite an antique; ordinary cubicle drones still used it, but one might expect someone like Jansky to have a smaller, faster, and newer model. He used the 105 model for a simple reason: its wireless network interface controller was separate from the motherboard and Vinov was able to remove it. If there was Nazi spyware built into the computer, it was just spinning around in circles, unable to connect to the internet and alert the Gestapo to its findings. To allow him to “hide in plain sight,” he had two DR 105 laptops of the same color, one he used for his project and the other for his work and personal life. He was careful never to allow them to be seen together.

Jansky clicked on his documents folder and created a new document, giving it the nonsense name “Tetodidun.” A program that ran in the background and was set to detect this activated. It ran for about thirty seconds, unencrypting his secret files. A folder containing his book and the photocopied diaries sprouted into view. Jansky went to the folder and opened his rough draft and a diary. He resumed where he had left off in transcribing part of the diary into Romanized Russian. With the diaries, as with so much else, the eighty-twenty rule was applicable. Most were boring, recording personal struggles, usually with little in the way of introspection. But a minority were valuable. The one he was transcribing, by a man named Timofey Antonov, would illustrate the level of fantasy that gripped many of the deportees. Antonov frequently wrote about his belief that it was “inevitable” that there would be a “fourth world war” between Germany and the “remaining powers” of China and Japan. He believed this even as he knew from prewar government statistics Germany’s overwhelming military superiority. As the years went by, he spoke less and less about his hope/fear of a new war and more about the workaday reality of his life. At first, Antonov wrote unfavorably of the “ignorant masses” in Ukraine who had lived under Nazi rule since the 1940s. He, like many of the diarists, gradually acclimated to their norm as he became used to powerlessness.

When the clock struck six, Jansky packed his things and walked out of the office, seeing that Orlov had left and Egorov was still there. There seemed to be an unwritten rule that Orlov, Egorov, and Jansky would leave very close to 6 pm, while Maxim Semko usually left around 4, and Alya Semko would sometimes leave hours before 6 pm and would sometimes stay for hours afterward. Jansky walked to the elevator, glided down to the lobby, then

exited and started the short walk to his apartment. It was a warm day in Kyiv, conducive to expressions of human happiness. On the sidewalks were workers relieved to be finished with work, couples smiling and whispering to one another, and children poking each other and laughing. Before Jansky began the project, he had a good grasp of history but didn't think much about the perspectives of those who lived through it. Now, as he scanned the ghetto streets, he often had the thought: "what would the deportees have seen here, and what would they think if they could see it now?"

Our time traveler would, Jansky thought, take his first breath of unpolluted air, see the clean streets full of happy, smartly dressed people speaking Russian and think the Nazi regime had somehow been overthrown. After a few moments, he'd note the repetitive concrete-and-glass boxes and grumble at the future's philistine attitude toward the arts. Then, after a few more moments, he'd note ominously how narrow the streets are, as tight as the streets of the ghetto had been. He'd notice that there were buses, bikes, and many pedestrians but no cars. But hostility to automobiles had been common in many countries in the prewar world, the U.S. and Soviet Union among them, and he'd figure the anti-auto activists must have won, at least wherever it was that he had landed. He'd continue wandering down the streets and, as he moved into the poorer sections of the ghetto, would start to think that the recovery wasn't so complete, noting the poorly-dressed inhabitants. Still, he'd see that, in contrast to his time, few appeared underfed. Then he'd see the ghetto wall and think it all a grotesque nightmare. Throughout Jansky's life, he had been raised with the belief, rarely stated explicitly, that while one could imagine a radically different far future, he and his children and his children's children, would always be 'prisoners' of the ghetto. Reading about the lives of the diarists in "free Russia" made it easier to visualize a life for his people, and for himself, that was "free." But he dismissed this feeling as irrational, for the past really was dead.

Due to the Nazi prohibition on "ostentatious" architecture in the ghettos, the only clue to an area's wealth was the size of its buildings. An aerial view of the ghetto would show a line of tall buildings from the center of the ghetto extending West to the Sugenlar, one of the four Kripo checkpoints. Those wealthy people who worked inside the ghetto, including the high-ranking pillar officials, mostly lived in the central neighborhood of Bendzary. Those who worked outside the ghetto for the banks and tech companies of Vanbar Street lived in the West. The North, East, and South formed a reversed "C" around the ghetto's richer and taller West and Center. When Jansky was a child growing up in the South, he thought of Bendzary as homogeneously wealthy. Now that he lived there, he had a keen consciousness of the differences within the neighborhood. If the neighborhood was a solar system, it had two suns, the Yamel Tower, where the pillar council met, and the Yushov Building, where President Linov lived on the fifty-sixth-floor penthouse. Separating the buildings was Tarasov Street, which most people

called *Sovetskaya Street*. (Soviet Street) According to Maslak, all the pillar council members except one lived in the innermost part of the “solar system,” a few blocks from Yamel. The most prestigious malls and restaurants, the most prestigious private schools, and the two most prestigious athletic clubs were all within five blocks of Yamel. Within the North Kyiv Ghetto, populated by 2.9 million Russians, there was a kind of small-town society for the ghetto’s elites. Jansky would have to make do with being nine blocks away, still close enough to walk to work. To an outsider, he was at the center; to him, not quite.

Just as the distinctions within the wealthy neighborhood grew sharper as Jansky rose from the middle class to the lower rungs of the upper class, so too did the differences within the upper class itself. As a child, his mental map had three classes: working, middle, and upper. As he climbed into the upper class, he saw it separate into “new money” and “old money,” “meritocrats” and “aristocrats.” The aristocrats dominated the pillar council and many older banks and engineering companies. The new money dominated the software industry and some of the newer banks. The aristocrats were members of the Alexander Gulin (“AG”) athletic club. Excluded from AG, the new money formed the Alexander Filatov (“AF”) athletic club. The athletic clubs were the paradigmatic example of new/old segregation, but it also extended to some malls, restaurants, bars, dance halls, theatres, orchestras, intellectual clubs, and art galleries. Even the charities that helped the same working-class people could be segregated in this way. If the Nazis allowed Russians to print their own newspapers and magazines, Jansky had little doubt these would be segregated too.

Jansky had no choice but to identify with the new money. A.G. Club would never admit him no matter how high he climbed. But he continually reminded himself not to overrate the differences between old money and new. The segregation was not absolute; neighborhoods, apartment buildings, and private schools were integrated. Jansky’s children could attend the same private schools as the old money kids. If they get old money kids to vouch for them, they might be able to get membership in A.G. Club. If they married ‘real’ old money spouses, their children will be part of the class and admitted by default. In this way, the new money continually flows into the old. The attitudes of the individual new money men toward this differed radically. Some were eager to assimilate *now*. Others wanted to maintain their distinctiveness, condemning the old money as corrupt and decadent and wanting to shield their children from the old money’s laziness and bad habits. Most of the Glanzia Forum members were part of the latter group and Jansky was careful not to let on the fact that he sometimes found their perspectives myopic. Soso Isayev, a thirty-four-year-old tech startup founder, was probably the worst in this regard. He often said that “everyone” hated those aristocrats, forgetting that the old-money/new-money distinction was considered unimportant by the masses.

Jansky arrived at his building and walked into its small lobby. Unlike the buildings at the very center of Bendzary, the Ivanov building had no security team. Anyone could just walk in and take the elevators up to any floor. Still, unlike his childhood home, Ivanov had a real front lobby with couches rather than uncomfortable steel chairs. He walked to the elevator and pressed the button for the fifteenth floor, ascending and getting off a minute later. When he first moved to Ivanov, he was struck by how widely separated the doors were, revealing the size of the apartments within. He walked through the empty hall and arrived at his apartment.

It was a “two-bedroom one-bath” just like the apartment he had grown up in, but the bedrooms, bathroom, kitchenette, and living/dining room were all about twice the size. It was also well-decorated. After Jansky got hired by Dador, he decided to splurge a little and hired an interior decorator, whose price was surprisingly low. With a color scheme of blue and gray, the furniture, the dining table, the television, the ottoman, and the paintings on the wall were carefully selected and placed to display symmetry, harmony, and modernity. It was a stark contrast to his childhood apartment, a melange of colors and styles formed out of whatever pieces of furniture were cheapest and easiest to move. His father, Rodya Jansky, had made a show of emphasizing how alien it felt to him, a man of the so-called “true middle class.” He had said the decoration was to impress friends who might potentially get him even better jobs later, but deep down, he didn’t really believe it.

As Jansky entered his apartment, he found his wife Nora in the kitchenette at the front of the apartment. She was mixing orange chicken, a Chinese dish. Their daughters, Lida, four years old, and Olya, two years old, were sitting on the ground in the living/dining room, feebly playing catch with a couple of stuffed animals. He was happy to see no sign that Lida had done anything to anger her mother. Nora Jansky was twenty-eight years old and very beautiful. She was one-eighth Kazakh, but it was not apparent in her physical appearance, which reflected her predominately North Russian ancestors. While Toma Jansky looked Slavic, his wife appeared a perfect fit for the “ideal Nordic woman” of Nazi propaganda, with long blond hair, blue eyes, and a Nordic face. She was a native of Adolfsberg, which the Russians privately called Leningrad, and had migrated to the ghetto as a young adult, marrying Jansky a short time later. She worked as a computer programmer for a Siemens contractor at an office in the ghetto and worked less than her husband, doing most of the work taking care of their daughters. They planned to have another child, but they had years to do so before the productivization mandate kicked in. The two were very loving with one another, and Toma loved to show off her beauty and intelligence. She was dressed casually, in a red t-shirt and dark grey jeans, allowed and indeed encouraged by her workplace.

“How was work?” she asked.

"Stonk go up, stonk go down, same old," he said. He took off his business suit and prepared to sit down at the table. "But there is other news. I met with Maslak today. He wants me to meet Juliet Perot."

"The woman who manages the 'models'?"

"Yeah."

"You looking forward to it?"

"Yes. I could play the part of the man who is not at all interested in that sexual stuff. But you know that isn't me. Rather, my persona is that of the man who is interested in the 'sexual economy' for the same reason I am interested in the market in general."

She smiled and laughed as she pressed the chicken into the pan. While Toma Jansky worked the standard ten-hour day during the week with a five-hour half day on Saturday, Nora only worked three ten-hour days. When she didn't work, she attempted to have dinner ready for her husband at exactly 6:10. He attempted to be home at exactly 6:10. On the days when she worked, they made do with microwavables. There was no tension between the couple or arguments about fairness, and he couldn't help but feel a bit of smug satisfaction when others said such arguments were "inevitable."

Toma and Nora Jansky had grown up in the "true middle class," resentful of their wealthier peers who appropriated the term. They grew up on the common middle-class Russian diet, lots of bread, potatoes, rice, and instant noodles, lots of soup made from canned meat and vegetables and spice packets, imitation coffee and tea, vitamins and caffeine pills. On occasion, when their parents had money and time to spend, they'd get fresh meat and vegetables and home-baked cake and bread. They'd complain about their usual diet and be reminded that working-class Russians consider the canned meat they were complaining about to be a luxury.

Now the family had the time and money for the fresh and the real and Toma found that it was usually far superior. He hadn't thought he liked "orange chicken," knowing it only from the frozen bricks of flavored ice and mashed-up chicken one could buy at the supermarket. Now his wife had the time to make it for real and the money to buy the ingredients, with fresh meat and sugar, vinegar, soy sauce, ginger, and orange flavoring. (not actual juice, alas) Toma Jansky still ate much of the cheap and fast, thinking that no matter how rich he got, he would always dine on instant noodle soup and frozen mashed potatoes with butter. He outright preferred the taste of imitation coffee to the real stuff. But by and large, he loved being "rich," seeing only a little insight in the old saying, supposedly of English origin, that money cannot buy happiness. If he acted to emphasize the cheap-skate aspect of his personality, it was in part to keep his brother, sister, and brother-in-law off his back. (The couple did send small sums to support their parents.)

After Nora finished with the chicken, she served it with a side of rice and got her husband a glass of water. The two began to eat, the children, he presumed, having already eaten earlier. He thought about what he had said to

Maslak, that his wife doesn't suspect a thing. He dismissed as irrational the notion she did suspect something funny was up. The fact that there was a bunker beneath the Yamel Tower was still hard for *him* to believe. She was cynical about Yuri Maslak, more so than him, but hers was the opinion that he was less important than he thought he was, not that he was "up to no good."

He thought about the subtle differences between himself and his wife. They had both been born to families at the same income level, both had trained as computer programmers, though only she still worked as one, and both were intelligent and "nerdy." But whereas his parents were solidly average in the wealthy ghetto of North Kyiv, hers were at roughly the eighty-fifth percentile in the poorer ghetto of Leningrad. Her parents were managers, her father at a Chinese-owned cloth factory and her mother at a Chinese-owned department store. Relationships with the workers were not always rosy. There hadn't been any real labor violence in two generations, but the historical memory faded slowly. The result of this difference between Toma and his wife was that for a time in his early adulthood, he felt like an average man. She never felt like an average woman. It was perhaps this, along with gender, that accounted for the differing dialects they spoke, even to each other. Hers was "dictionary Russian," purified of foreign influence, while he used many Germanisms and Anglicisms common among working and middle-class North Kyivans.

After they finished eating, Nora came up to him and kissed him. "You gonna watch *Zeigler*?" she asked, referring to the TV series set to premiere that evening.

"Yes," he said. "I'm sure it'll be all the buzz at Glanzia. *Beobachter* says it provides 'a powerful illustration of the need for public capital markets,'" he said mockingly.

"Well then, I'll need to watch it with you."

"Thank you," he said.

"You don't need to thank me," she said, looking side to side around the spacious apartment. "You being a friend of Maslak, a member of the Glanzia Forum, got me this." Nora had been a member of the Glanzia Forum for the past five months, where she met Maslak and the members of his entourage. That she was pretty and knew economics jargon served to raise his status within the group, which was mostly male. One, Dima Melov, told Jansky that his model of the world excluded the possibility of men and women engaging in pillow-talk about the equity premium paradox. He was joking, of course, but on some level he wasn't.

The two sat on the couch and waited for 7 p.m. to come. Nora laid in his lap.

"It's funny," Nora said. "You joined the Forum two years ago. I watched you saying, 'here's what I think it's gonna look like.' Then 'here's my first impression.' Then 'here's my revised impression,' after several months of membership. And I never thought I'd be going through the same thing."

He smiled. He got the idea of inviting his wife to join during his first meeting but kept it to himself for a long time. “So what is your ‘revised impression?’”

“Well, like you, I was turned off by the whole ‘rationalist’ thing. It’s like, who *doesn’t* claim to be rational? But I realized they really are different. Someone will be going on about something for fifteen minutes, you poke a hole in it, and they’re like, ‘oh, I guess I was wrong.’ I wish the leadership was like that.”

“Only one leader,” Toma said, referring to Maslak, the man with the money. The man with the brains, Ivan Vinov, didn’t admit to being wrong because he was hardly ever wrong.

“Yeah,” Nora said, smiling. “But still, the whole environment feels... fake. Like none of them are being their honest selves. They’re focusing all this mental energy on signaling their intelligence, ‘performing’ for an ‘audience,’ it’s just not... me. I wouldn’t go if you didn’t ask me to, tell you the truth.”

“I can see what you’re getting at. I’d say in response that the men in the group were ‘themselves,’ in eighth grade, then went to high school and the IQ one-upmanship Olympics began. They felt for a while like they were ‘acting,’ but they kept up with it and now they’ve been doing it for so long it *became* their true personalities. But it’s understandable if it’s not yours,” he said.

“I do get a lot of comments about it,” she said. “From people I wouldn’t have thought would be able to name a single intellectual club. ‘You’re part of *Glanzia*, OMG!’ They ask me about it and I tell them about Bayes Theorem and artificial intelligence and they’re like, ‘actually, I *don’t* want to know about this.’”

He laughed.

“Do you think it’s prominent solely because Maslak leads it?”

“Maslak leading it is 90% of it, but not all of it,” Toma said. “Here’s what I think happened. Club was founded in 2069 and Vinov was the first leader. Maslak joined in 2071, became the next leader. Vinov was a member of A.F. club at the time. He told me he was let in for a nominal sum. Now that tells me he had prominence already in 2071. I think it was because he had a reputation as the smartest kid in Bendzary Public. Among that clique of smart kids, some went on to become tech millionaires. Most didn’t. Vinov didn’t. But for the ones who did, supporting his status as intellectual guru was a way of signaling their continued adherence to that nerdish identity they were in danger of being alienated from due to their wealth.”

Nora nodded her agreement.

“Into this steps Maslak,” Jansky continued, “who is developing his identity as the type of guy who is friends with everyone. His own class of aristocrats, the workers on his construction site, the American KBA man, and the new money techie types. He joins A.F. club and asks around, ‘who are the prominent members of this class, who can educate me on its composition,

worldview, shibboleths?” He heard about Ivan Vinov and asked to join the group. Probably in those days, anyone could join; certainly the son of a councilman could.”

“What do you think the first meeting was like?” Nora asked.

“We can only speculate,” Toma said. “I’d bet some of the members thought Maslak was gonna attempt one meeting, then go back to the aristocrats and regale them with stories of those nerds and their bizarre theories. But that didn’t happen. He kept coming back. He had no math, no programming, but tried hard to show respect to the members, learn their language, speak it fluently. He told them, ‘hey, I’ve got this penthouse you can meet at,’ until then they had met at the library. He helped some members get jobs. Others he employed directly as ‘professional intellectuals.’ Vinov resigned so the father figure could be their leader.”

There was more to the story that he could not share with his wife. How Maslak, having become the Director of the Zoning Department in 2075, oversaw the construction of the time capsule underneath his Yamel Tower office, sometime between 2079 and 2081. Vinov and Sorokin knew about this. Possibly others did, too, Jansky was thinking specifically of Semko and Pavel Kolov, one of the group’s “professional intellectuals.” One reason Toma had a more favorable view of Maslak than his wife was that he knew about the time capsule and she didn’t. An uncharitable observer might think Maslak was a ‘talker’ who was born into his position but convinced himself he had gotten it through Machiavellian scheming. Toma knew there was more to him than that.

“Do you think he felt like a fish out of water at the early meetings?” Nora asked.

“Oh sure,” he said. “But gradually, he became what he was trying to mimic.”

Nora looked at him skeptically. “Do you think he could be a member of Glanzia if not for his wealth and position?”

“No,” he said with little hesitation. “But he’d be part of the general ‘nerd culture.’ As a ‘hanger-on,’ if you will. Back in high school, I sat at the ‘nerd table,’ with a dozen kids. Eight or nine were smart enough to be considered ‘core members.’ Three or four were ‘hangars-on.’ The distinction was never made explicit, but we knew who was in the advanced classes, who scored very high on the tests. The hangers-on would fumble through our conversations about science fiction or Austria-Hungary, bow out when we started discussing calculus. We in the core liked having them around. They elevated our own status.”

“Some of my friends have asked me if Glanzia is a cult. With Maslak as cult leader,” Nora said. Her smile revealed she didn’t think the accusation was entirely fair but had some basis in fact.

“How’d you respond?”

“Well, I didn’t provide any detail that could *support* the accusation,” she

said, smiling.

There was detail to provide. Maslak said things at the Glanzia Forum meetings that everyone knew were false. The Polynesians came west from South America rather than east from Asia. The French Revolution predated the American Revolution. The “law of large numbers” refers to the fact that the volume of a cube increases faster than its surface area. No one apart from Vinov spoke up, and then only on occasion.

“I pointed out,” Nora said, “that the crucial difference is that the rich man at the top of a cult takes his followers’ money. The flow of money in Glanzia goes in the opposite direction.”

“Good,” he said.

“I always say the most positive things possible about it in public,” she said.

At that moment, *Zeigler* came on and Toma unmuted the television. *Zeigler* looked to be an impressive piece of Nazi propaganda. Although notionally private, the film industry was so heavily regulated as to make it a virtual arm of the Nazi government. Jansky had little doubt that *Zeigler* was produced at a loss. The broad masses of all groups were uninterested in finance. Intelligent Germans, as they usually go to work for the party or the state, would find the world it spoke of, the world of capital markets and recessions and real estate speculation, too foreign to be interesting. The target audience was the smarter of Reich subjects. Subhumans could never be publicly acknowledged as an audience, but undoubtedly the ad executives counted on some to tune in. Jansky could tell himself he was watching for purely practical reasons. He had to understand the worldview of the Reich subjects, you see, to be able to better do business with them. But this wasn’t true. He watched the programs because they were pleasant to watch, despite the occasional barb of “the Russian is little better than the Jew.”

In one sense, Jansky had seen the miniseries many times before. Nazi propaganda rarely deviated from a small set of themes, narrated over and over with different settings. Its villain would be Vinay Raghavan, who built up *Zeigler* into a real estate company supposedly worth billions of Weltmarks before its failed IPO. After a few months of drama, Raghavan was imprisoned for breach of fiduciary duty. Raghavan’s capitalism was the bad, “Jewish” capitalism, in contrast to the good, “productive” capitalism of the “first-tier” corporations. The Nazi propagandists were not stupid. They knew that nobody would weep for the state-owned Deutsche Bank, the first-tier Liang Group, or the hereditary elites incompetently managing them. So there would be some ordinary, upper-middle-class Indians who worked for Raghavan, who believed in him and worked hard for the company only to see their jobs gone and themselves under an unjust cloud of suspicion due to his capriciousness and greed.

The existence of shows like *Zeigler* could illustrate the “progress” of the regime’s economic policy. For the first hundred years, there could be nothing

like it. The newspapers had stories about businessmen indicted for corruption, but propaganda only ever attacked “Anglo-American” capitalism, something that after 1969 was increasingly a dead issue. To portray corruption in the Reich itself would be to admit the weakness and indecisiveness of the Nazi state. Hitler in the 1940s and Himmler in the 1970s had made a deal with German big business. In return for ceding influence to German “workers” (really the German state), they were compensated with land and factories in the conquered areas. It was a win-win situation for all who mattered. But this was only a stopgap; the contradiction in Nazi ideology remained. The “compromise between capitalism and socialism” consisted of a river of new regulations continually delivered to corporate mailrooms with little thought to how to incentivize compliance. The result was widespread evasion combined with the occasional nationalization of the worst offenders.

Slowly, however, a “new deal” emerged. The state-owned enterprises received more funding, allowing them to offer German workers salaries and benefits the private sector could not match. Talented Germans who in prior generations would have gone into business instead went to work for the state itself. This, along with voluntary migration to the Reich and the deportation of the Black populations of Africa and Latin America to European ghettos, meant that workers and bosses in the private sector were increasingly non-German. For Germans, the socialist promises of national socialism seemed to be achieved.

Allowing the Indians, Chinese, and Anglo-Americans such power over commerce could have proved a long-term threat to the regime. That German CEOs remained at the very top of most firms was no guarantee of real control. As the Chinese say: “the mountains are high and the emperor is far away.” The Nazis thus adopted a more systematic approach to regulation. Rather than attempting strict control over the whole economy, they focused on a small number of “first-tier” firms that they could control using both carrot and stick. The firms got government contracts, artificially cheap capital from the Weltbank, the ability to own intellectual property, the ability to collude in “enterprise organizations” to stiff second-tier suppliers, and emergency bailouts from the state. In return, they complied with a series of regulations set by the Economic Regulation Board, with “ERB compliance officers,” sometimes German and sometimes not, embedded into companies to avoid unintentional violations. The most important cost the first-tier companies had to bear was little flexibility over employment decisions. For “permanent” positions, they had to enact harsh discrimination in favor of men and graduates from the state-controlled university system, with subhumans excluded absolutely. To promote eugenic fertility, promotion policies within firms had to favor men who were married and had children. Firing workers became difficult and laying them off almost impossible.

Of the Reich subjects, only a third of men and a few percent of women had “lifetime” jobs, either at first-tier firms, the state, or the “subject pillars”

which provided self-government to the various subject groups. But this 1/6th of the population had disproportionate influence over the worldview of the subject population as a whole. By providing well-paying jobs secured from economic whirlwinds to a core group of high-status *paterfamilias*, the Nazis established stable support for the regime among the Reich subjects without giving any real autonomy or intellectual freedom and without compromising its segregationist policies.

The system allowed the regime to feel no embarrassment at the fact that the crimes at Zeigler occurred under its nose. Despite its supposed valuation, Zeigler was never a first-tier firm. It existed in the space of second-tier firms that did business with the first-tier and provided flexibility the first tier could not. It was a world of relative meritocracy and rapid adaptation to change, a world in which there were no limits on executive compensation, where one's college degree mattered less and how many children one had did not matter at all. A talented worker could be paid handsomely but did not expect security. The people Raghavan hired knew the risks.

The second-tier was, of course, the sector of the subhumans. Even the law that subhumans could not manage Reich subjects was known to be flouted in some of the most important second-tier firms. It was natural for Toma Jansky, his wife, and everyone in the ghetto watching to be rooting for Raghavan to defraud the state-owned and first-tier banks.

Chapter 2

Toma Jansky wore his standard black business suit and stood at the front of a classroom, a man who could pass for someone just a few years out of high school, yet undoubtedly speaking from a position of authority. About fifty students sat at the desks in front of him. At the very front were two adult men, presumably the teacher and a high official at the school, maybe the principal. The students sitting behind them were perhaps the smartest in the ghetto. While the private school population was smarter on average, the public schools drew from a much larger base. The cream of the crop came to Bendzary Public; the smartest of Bendzary Public were arranged before him. About two-thirds were boys, but other than that the classroom looked like any other. Bendzary was elite, but it got the same funding as all the rest of the schools. The students' desks in front of him, the teacher's desk behind him, the bookshelf at the back, and the projector hanging from the ceiling were exactly as he remembered from his own high school in Southern North Kyiv. Only the school uniforms were different, blue instead of gray.

His was, Jansky thought, a strange progression. He had not sat in those chairs, though perhaps he could have. He did very well in mathematics, economics, and German but was a C-student in physics and chemistry, subjects he didn't think were useful. He remembered a particular incident in

11th grade. He was in physics class, not paying attention and instead reading a book, *The Political Structure of National Socialist Germany*. The book was written for an audience of Reich subjects and foreigners. It was propaganda, of course, but it was also quite informative as a “core dump” on how the regime worked, how despite the image of the omnipotent Fuhrer, the regime was actually an oligarchy, with different power centers acting to check one another and prevent the state from deviating from its ideology. It was far too large to be hidden within a textbook, so Jansky simply plopped it on his desk. Mr. Startsev came over and confiscated the book but hesitated when he saw the title. The principal had recommended it, and Jansky had gotten it from the school library, being one of the few to follow his advice. Startsev simply gave the book back and Jansky resumed reading. He wasn’t going to punish Jansky, but he wasn’t going to go to bat for him either. Yet his odd reading habits would ultimately prove far more beneficial to him than knowledge of physics or chemistry. While all intelligent Russians were interested in the world a few blocks outside the ghetto walls, few at the time were interested in the much more distant world of Germany and Nazi ideology.

Then, shortly after Jansky graduated from high school, on July 11, 2084, this all changed. There had been various attempts to nudge and cajole Germans and high-earning Reich subjects to have more children. Jansky had mulled the possibility that the Nazis could decide they wanted more high-earning subhumans, too. And they wouldn’t use mild nudges but large sticks. On July 11, Fuhrer Hans Litzr announced that those who earned more than 45,000 Weltmarks and didn’t produce at least three children by age thirty-four for women and thirty-six for men would have to pay very high taxes. This was inclusive of about half of the ghetto’s population. It was common for people of Jansky’s generation to say they were “children of July 11.” It was perhaps truer for him than for anyone else. July 11 allowed him to proclaim and exaggerate his insight into the world of Nazism, the fiction that he had “predicted” the mandate. Now he was back in high school, invited to speak about his experiences working in the tech and financial industries of Vanbar Street. He hadn’t written out the speech, which would have been illegal, but had a small sheet of paper with some bullet points.

“My name,” he said, “is Toma Jansky. I am a financial analyst with Dador Capital. I started here, Kozar High School, in the South. This environment, it’s all very familiar to me. I was sitting in those same chairs as you. I, too, remember listening to talks just like this. I was in the accelerated program, went to the Kairis Programming Academy, and worked for many years on Vanbar Street, first as a computer programmer. I was asked to come here today to tell you about my experiences there. Perhaps my age was a factor, the thinking being that you’ll be more likely to listen to someone you can relate to.”

He paused and considered his words. “After I graduated from Kairis, I was recruited by Nemul, a second-tier American firm that is basically a

satellite of DBB, a first-tier firm. The owners, managers, and a few of the programmers at Nemul were American; most of the programmers were Russian. I worked there for two years, after which I got a job in a different kind of company, Glazau Financial Analytics, G.F.A. for short, where I worked as a kind of hybrid programmer and market analyst. G.F.A., like Nemul, was an American-owned, second-tier company that contracted with the first-tier firm Credit Suisse. Unlike at Nemul, both the programmers and those who oversaw them at G.F.A. were Russian. The entire technology department was made up of Russians, with management's job being to market our technology. My boss had the title of Chief Technology Manager. We joked that he was really Chief Executive Officer. When I worked my way up to management, I was given the title of Deputy Chief Technology Manager. We joked that I was really CTO. It wouldn't have broken any laws for us to have those titles, mind you, so long as ultimate authority lies with the Americans. But it would have been bad for marketing. A year ago, I got a new job as a financial analyst at Dador Capital. It, too, is American-owned and based on Vanbar Street, but I mainly work in its office at the Yamel Tower. By the time I was hired at Dador, I had had enough of the outside world."

He smiled, then reached into his bag and pulled out a framed photograph of himself, his wife, and their two daughters. "I have this on my desk in my Yamel Tower office," he said, waving it around. "I had nothing like this on my desk in my Vanbar Street office. There would be no law against it. But if I tried to take this through the checkpoint and told the soldiers, 'I want this on my desk,' they would likely seize it. If I bought a picture frame at a store outside the ghetto and printed a photo to place in it, my boss would likely tell me that it isn't proper to have that on my desk. Not illegal, mind you, just improper. The Americans and Indians can have photos of their families on their desks. You cannot. There are innumerable unwritten rules to humiliate you, remind you of your inferior status. If you want to succeed out there, you must pretend not to care."

He calmly put the picture frame away. "Another thing I want to stress here is the necessity of empathizing with the American and Indians you will meet on Vanbar street. Granted, if you want a job as a dead-end code monkey, you can manage with 'yes sir, no sir.' But to make real money, you need to "market" yourself, and to do that, you need to empathize with the "market." Empathy is not the same thing as sympathy, mind you. You don't need to like them; just be able to model their minds. The Americans, Indians, and the odd Chinese you will meet on Vanbar are similar to us in many ways. They have a language they use at home, English, Hindi, etc., and the language they use in the business world, German. They dream about getting rich, seek romance on online dating sites, work out in athletic clubs, and look forward to the next episode of their favorite TV show. They complain about government regulation, discrimination based on class and gender, and their boss who isn't nearly as smart as he thinks he is. The young call the old close-minded, the

old call the young impulsive. Their pillars cover the Reich while ours only cover a single ghetto, but the institutions, and the complaints one hears about them, are quite similar,” Jansky said. He decided not to go into detail about these complaints with the adults in the room. “Empathizing with them won’t always be as easy as it is today,” he continued. “Let the racial laws run for a million more years, and we’ll be separate species, in fact as well as in ideology.”

“Like us, their lives are shaped by sudden changes in Reich policy. Most of you were, on July 11, too young to understand the significance of what had happened. But you know that it was a formative event for people my age and older. The Reich subjects have dates they remember. The oldest remember the end of paper currency. The middle-aged man who may employ you in a few years remembers the Eugenic Protection Decree of 2065. It was to them what July 11 was to us. The news will tell you that no German, Reich subject, or guest worker had any problem with August 19, 2065. It says the same thing for all government policies. You naturally wonder if reality might be a bit different. I can tell you now that I don’t think so. I think that there was griping at the time, but by now, most look back nostalgically not on the era before the act but on the couple of years after it. What actually happened is often less important than how people remember it, and people remember the “crisis of 2065” as resulting in a surge of pro-Nazi sentiment among the Reich subjects.”

“Think of it from the point of view of a Reich subject, say an Indian, born in 2035. You grew up hearing worries about the low fertility rate among the upper classes. People argued about what caused it, whether it was cultural or economic. There were tone-deaf exhortations to marry and have children. Firms were ordered to create natalist incentives. You heard over and over the explanation that the problem was high real estate prices in high-class cities. One had to move there because the jobs were there. The jobs had to be there because the high-skilled workers were there. Some *Gauleiter* enacted half-measures, some positive, building more housing, some negative, limiting housing construction on the theory that urbanization per se rather than high prices was the problem. You suspected that the Nazis were not up to the task, that they might worry a bit about the problem but had neither the smarts nor the inclination to roll their sleeves up and think long and hard about how to fix it, that they could offer only cliches.”

“Then one day, without any warning, the Fuhrer acted. Thereafter, to hire a German or Reich subject in an area required special coupons. Companies had no choice but to move their offices. An exodus from the cities began. And a couple years later, the effect was clear. Workers had more elbow room. Marriages, and the rate of fertility within marriages, increased among the upper-middle classes. The solution came from the ivory tower of the Advanced School of the NSDAP. They knew about the problem, they listened, they argued, they debated among themselves, all in secret, of course,

but when they acted, it was decisive, effective, permanent. So you decide to attend a rally in support of your pillar, where for the first time in your life, you put your arm in the air and yell over and over,” Jansky said, making the Nazi salute and then attempting to speak in English-accented German: ““the Fuhrer is always right, the Fuhrer is always right!””

He looked across the classroom and smiled. “Or maybe you didn’t do that,” he said. “Maybe you grumbled that you liked living in the city. Maybe you grumbled that it was economically inefficient. Maybe you worried the “subhumans” would now have an unfair advantage as they could cram together as much as they like. Maybe you said the Nazis claim they don’t interfere in the cultural development of the subject peoples and should actually do so. Maybe you said those things, but if that was you, you likely remember it differently. All you remember doing was occasionally playing the ‘devil’s advocate.’”

“Why am I telling you this stuff? Why does it matter for you? Because your American boss, without any warning, might suddenly ask you for your opinion on things like the Eugenic Protection Decree. After years of speaking only about scripting errors, interest rates, email response times, suddenly, he asks your opinion about this ‘intellectual’ topic. I can’t tell you now what he wants to hear, because some men want to hear X and others the opposite of X. To determine which it is, you must be able to empathize with him, see the world through his eyes.”

“Now, how do you, American businessman, see the Russians who work for you on Vanbar Street? How do you see Vanbar Street? It’s a somewhat foreign place. You commute in from Malyn, 20 miles west. At home, you see Russians only in positions of clear inferiority. We’re servants and manual laborers. It’s different in the business zone that surrounds the North Kyiv Ghetto. There you can pay a subhuman more than the maximum wage. That’s the only legal difference, but there’s a major difference in the culture. You go into a high-end restaurant and there will be Russians there as both staff and customers. Go into a shop and you may well stand in line behind a Russian. Only the bars do not admit them. And in the firms themselves, while officially subhumans are never in positions higher than Reich subjects, reality can be different.”

“How do you expect the subhumans to respond to this?” Jansky asked rhetorically. “Naturally, you expect them to be enormously thankful to you for treating them as ‘equals,’” he said. Jansky continued his speech, telling the students about the financial journalist magazines and how they can be windows into the worldview of the American businessman. He emphasized that although it’s very hard for employees to be fired from first-tier firms, they are required to show up in the office for long hours. He also told them about the “cultural relics” of the time when insider trading was illegal. As he spoke, he thought about the two adults sitting at the desk to the side of him. One was presumably the teacher. The other was perhaps the principal. The program

that led to his speech, which didn't have any official name, was organized between the education department and the anti-poverty department, headed by Fedor Panko, a member of the Glanzia Forum and a friend of Yuri Maslak. Jansky toyed with the idea that there was some "political" significance to the program but thought Occam's Razor was that it was what it appeared to be: either for the benefit of the students or to flatter the speakers. In any case, Jansky hoped the school official would be impressed with him and would relay the favorable impression to Panko.

Jansky finished his speech, answered a few questions from the audience, was thanked by the two adults, and then left the room. He had been watching the students' facial expressions to see if they were impressed or not and couldn't tell. But really he hardly cared. Who were they, after all? The teacher and school official had looked impressed, which was what mattered.

Jansky walked through the hallways slowly and leisurely, wondering if his children would ever be there. Most likely, they would not. They'd go to public school up to eighth grade and private school thereafter. The Jansky family was rich enough to afford private school but not enough for it to be painless. Yet every time he put pencil to paper, he concluded that if private school delivered even a modest increase in his children's chance of marrying a wealthy spouse or getting a good job through connections, it was worth the money. Some of his old friends would be disappointed, but their opinions shouldn't count for anything.

When he reached the front of the school, he was surprised to find Maxim Semko sitting on one of the benches. Maxim Semko had dark brown hair, blue eyes, pale skin, and no facial hair. He wore a black business suit with no tie. He was a small man, thin and around 5'5" in height. His face was rather boyish, but something about him made him seem older than he actually was. Semko's mother was a big shot, so Panko had to give him the same job as Jansky, who smiled at the thought of the students meeting later and comparing the two speakers.

"Hi," Semko said. "I thought I'd wait for you to finish. Wondered how you did."

"I thought I did okay. Quite a few eyes were rolling," Jansky said, falsely.

Semko got up, and the two walked out the front door. They were about six blocks from the Yamel Tower and began to walk back to their workplace.

"I don't think they liked me either," Maxim said.

"Why not?"

"Because I had nothing in common with them," Semko said. "I didn't attend a public school."

"How'd they know," Jansky said, feigning surprise.

"I didn't say anything about it, but the first question was, 'yada yada you went to a private school, right?'"

"I guess they assume everyone does unless they explicitly state otherwise."

“Perhaps, but it went deeper, I think. Something about me gives it away.”

“That’s unfortunate,” Jansky said. Maxim Semo usually did little work at Dador. The one time he attempted to write a paper, his mother, Orlov, and Egorov were all harshly critical. Jansky would, in that situation, have either mounted a vigorous defense of his paper or made a show of promising he’d do better next time, asking for advice on this and that. Semko did neither, smiling and accepting the criticism as if it was an elementary school project where everything was alright so long as one made a good-faith effort and was a “team player.” This was an attitude that could only derive from being born wealthy. It wasn’t surprising the children could detect it.

“I don’t think they liked me, either,” Jansky said, again lying. “But then, they weren’t supposed to, just as they’re not supposed to like the doctor who tells them to eat their vegetables.”

“So what’d you tell them about how you achieved your ‘success,’ your ‘elite’ position?” Semko asked.

Jansky thought the kids didn’t see him as a member of any ‘elite,’ but as just another man in a suit. “Financial analyst” was only an elite job if paired with a company like Grimmen or ZTT. Jansky about equaled their entry-level wage, but unless he stated that explicitly people assumed Dador was a tiny startup. “I gave the partial truth,” he said, smiling. “I went to programming school, started as an analyst slash programmer at GFA, and worked my way up to management. Then I was hired at Dador.”

Semko smiled. “Tell me again the ‘real story.’”

Jansky smiled. “It all goes back to July 11. I was in programming school at the time. There were six of us in a small room. Window was open. We were a study group, led by Nazariy Zelinski. He was strict with distractions. He made us silence the notifications on our computers so we could focus on the task at hand. I don’t think any of us had cell phones back then. So for about an hour there, we didn’t know. Then a kid named Dmitriy banged on the door, told us to check the news. Nazariy told him to shut up, that we were busy, but I knew something had happened. Something terrible. I checked the news. Fuhrer was speaking.”

“Were you guys upset?”

“I don’t know if upset is the right word. I’d say we were sad. When Vashchenko got arrested, that upset us, as we had someone nearby we could be angry with, the ghetto police. But July 11? That was Berlin, a notional world we didn’t understand and, until that day, had little interest in.”

“And so, suddenly interested in that world, they came to you?”

“Yes. I was known to be interested in those things. If anyone had a question about the Nazi eugenics program, and it was rare that they did because, again, few were interested in it, they knew I was the person to ask. I never said I predicted July 11. I simply stated it as a possibility. But the rumor soon started to spread that I had “predicted” it. I always said, no, no, I didn’t really, I just mulled it as a possibility.”

“That was more than anyone else could say.”

“Yes. I had actually tried to found an ‘economics club,’ of course everyone said they didn’t have time. Then people were like, hey, economics club, what’s the status of that? So I created it. I had an audience. Attendance was irregular. We really were busy with programming, after all.”

“So you went to malls?”

“Only one mall, Kishka’s, in the south.”

“What was it like?”

Jansky smiled. “It’s like the old saying, the world of the poor is more real, more down-to-earth, more comfy, to those who have never experienced it or have not experienced it for a long time.”

Semko laughed softly. “The people, I take it, were not very smart?”

“Yes. And it went beyond that. One man would speak, then a second, then a third, and there was no room for response to any of the speakers. There’d be about twenty people listening, and they didn’t want to hear criticism of the speakers. The speeches were more than anything theatrical performances. To point out, ‘oh, you’ve got your facts wrong,’ people would be like, ‘you’re missing the point.’ It’s about being able to speak and have other people listen to you, to engage in ‘intellectual’ conversation in Russian rather than German.””

“So why go?”

“Because I was eighteen, and there weren’t many who wanted to listen to me. I thought there was an off chance there’d be some diamond in the rough in the audience, whose attention I could attract.”

“You attracted the attention of the police.”

“Yes,’ he said, smiling. “It really helped my online dating profile. Though I guess I don’t actually have an ‘arrest record.’ They were adamant that I was not under arrest but also that I could not leave until I talked to them.”

Semko laughed.

“But to be serious, it wasn’t a big deal.”

“Did you feel that way then?”

“Yes,” Jansky said, falsely. “I knew they were just doing their due diligence. They just wanted to know that I wasn’t a moron. That I knew what I could do, mock Hitler’s mustache, and what I couldn’t, like speculating about the methods used during the genocide of Jews. It was soon clear I was neither an idiot nor a martyr looking to be sent to Siberia.”

“I guess that makes sense,” Semko said. Jansky couldn’t tell if he was skeptical or not. “Were there any fights at the mall?” he asked.

“Physically, no. These people weren’t smart, but they weren’t complete disorganized morons. There were a few shouting matches.”

“Over what?”

He shrugged. “I don’t remember, but it was never about anything important. You know how young kids will be playing, and then kid one will say he hates kid two, and then a day later they’ll be best friends again? A lot

of people never mature from that stage.”

Semko laughed. “You often hear it said that people like us should ‘get out of the bubble.’ You think that’s overrated?”

“Yes,” he said. “Anyway, one time during the economics club meeting, an older man, father of one of the students, attended and afterward wanted to talk to me. He told me I should join the Atlantica Roundtable. People ask me what the name means. I don’t think it means anything. AR was a very different group than the tramps in the mall. These were middle-class people meeting regularly in the library, a club you couldn’t just join but had to be invited to. I went, I spoke, and I was applauded.”

“That led you to Glanzia.”

“Eventually, yes. The Atlantica Roundtable was not exactly a wellspring of intelligence. At one meeting, I heard about the Glanzia Forum and how its members met at the penthouse of a councilman, Yuri Maslak. Naturally, I was intrigued. Vinov attended one of the Atlantica meetings and I was impressed by his intelligence. I knew he was a librarian, went to the library, found him, and asked him how one joins Glanzia. I didn’t say, ‘I want to join,’ I said, ‘how do people join?’ And he said, and I quote: ‘to be a member, you have to be a somebody rather than a nobody.’”

Semko laughed.

“Anyway, I was expecting as much, though I didn’t expect the frankness. So I went back to AR. I felt that while the average person was just a workaday cubicle drone, there were a few people who seemed like they might know someone who knew someone who could offer me a job.”

“You had a shtick involving the financial markets?”

“Yes. Initially I spoke mainly about Nazi ideology, claimed that was what one could have used to predict July 11. The gradual movement from its original “Malthusian” to its current “Corncucopian” position, from thinking the world had too many people to thinking it had too few. But I eventually realized there was a better approach. Anyone of, say, 95 IQ and above can understand ideology. The IQ floor for economics is much higher. People were willing to say they knew nothing about Nazi ideology but wanted to pretend they knew something about economics. And they wanted to do it in a way where nobody would put them on the spot and say: okay, define the elasticity of demand. So they’d humble-brag, pretend they know enough to know this one guy, this boy genius, he really knows it. And that was me. Eventually, I convinced myself that one could have predicted July 11 by analyzing fluctuations in the trade times of the Weltbank High-Value Ghetto Real Estate Index Fund.”

“What do you mean, ‘convinced yourself?’” Semko asked, looking confused by Jansky’s statement.

“I believed it at the time. I no longer believe it, though, of course, I’d appreciate it if you kept silent about that detail. I was just a kid then, didn’t really understand statistics, confirmation bias, all that stuff. I p-hacked until I

got the result I wanted. One hour before the announcement of the mandate, no result. Forty-eight hours before the announcement of the mandate, no result. Eighteen hours before the announcement, result. I succeeded in the standard economics method, predicting the past.”

“What was it that you convinced yourself you had found?”

Jansky was silent for a few seconds, thinking about how to phrase the story in words Semko could understand. “July 11 did not come out of nowhere,” he said. “It happened during a bull market. The valuation of the Weltbank High-End Ghetto Real Estate Index Fund had been increasing over the past six months, but nobody thought much of it.”

“While the increase wasn’t that unusual, there did seem to be something strange happening with trade times. You see, all stock trading goes through the Weltbank and when you submit your buy or sell order, you get two timestamps, one for the submission time and another when the order completes. All the timestamps then go into an anonymized public database. This gives you confidence that the system really is as responsive as the Weltbank claims. If you think the data are made up, you can execute an order and then look in the database for your own timestamps. Anyway, if you think about the political economy of these things, you realize that the guy at the very top of the Weltbank was probably told that this internal debate within the Nazi party about whether to impose the mandate was occurring. He felt he needed to “do something.” So he put a thumb on the scale, slowed down trade times on this one asset, the High-End Ghetto Real Estate Index Fund, that he expected to be affected by news of the debate leaking out. The story I told was that this would have given the game away. The fund’s valuation did not increase much. The trade volume did not increase much. The “secret information” did not leak. But the very precautions taken to protect that secret information would have told you that, hey, there’s something suspicious here, involving this fund, you should buy it and it will go up. And it did go up.”

Semko looked confused. “But your ‘story’ isn’t true?”

Jansky smiled. “The trade times did increase,” he said. “But the increase was not nearly so high as I made it out to be. If you have a computer program constantly querying the trade times database, looking for trade time anomalies, it would have gone off in the days before July 11, but it would have gone off hundreds of other times, told you to invest in hundreds of other assets, assets that did not go up. Only if you cherry-picked the interval times would you get a program that would have ‘predicted’ July 11 and only July 11.”

“Did the people at the Atlantica Roundtable believe this?”

“They were a lot like the people at the mall. I don’t think they cared much, really. It was a place to find community, meaning, to get away from the wife and kids. Like churches in another age. If you put a gun to their head and asked them if a twenty-year-old kid really is this smart, they’d say no. But they wanted to believe it. Who else would they look up to, some Chinese

physicist, German economist? This kid might not be as knowledgeable as them, but he's Russian. So long as the kid is appropriately deferential to them, and I tried very hard to be so, they want to like him."

"So what you're saying is that the exact moment could not have been predicted, but the basic idea, that July 11 was a product of low interest rates, is correct?" He spoke slowly and carefully, like a student trying to understand a difficult concept.

Jansky smiled. When had he said anything about interest rates? Clearly, Maxim Semko did not understand his point. But he was trying to understand Toma Jansky, which he took as a good sign. "Yes. When interest rates are high, one machine can produce 2.5 machines in twenty-five years. When they are low, one machine can produce 1.5 machines. But the efficiency of human reproduction is unchanged. So directing more capital to human reproduction rather than standard capital investment provides a better return when interest rates are low."

Semko smiled. "Makes a lot of sense."

"I hope so," Jansky said with false modesty. "Anyway, continuing with the story, one day an elderly man named Rodion Torak showed up at the meetings. Told me I ought to be working at a stonk fund. Yes, he used the Anglicism 'stonk.' I had heard that from many people, so I just smiled and said, yes, I should, but he was insistent. I told him I had applied to some and got no responses. He said he knew a guy who knew a guy. I was suspicious because he wasn't particularly well-dressed. I humored him, said he should invite his friend to the next meeting, not expecting the friend to show up. The following week Torak was there. I thought he was alone and thought, 'well, so much for that.' But at the end of the meeting, I was approached by Nikita Delov, who gave me a job description. Said he was the Chief Technology Manager of Glazau Financial Analytics. I got an interview."

"What was it like?"

"It started with standard econ questions. I was asked where I learned all this and said, 'I taught myself.' I was asked to rate my public speaking skills. When Delov saw me at the roundtable meeting, I don't think I said anything, so he had nothing to go off of. I said my public speaking skills were fair. He told me I would need to be modest around clients but have permission to brag about myself during the interview. I said, 'okay, I rate my speaking skills as very good.' He asked for a typical speech. I gave my stump speech about July 11. I eventually got to my system that could have predicted July 11. I showed it to them and they hired me on the condition I stop telling people outside the company about it."

"Did you still believe in your computer program at the time?"

"Yes," said Jansky, untruthfully.

Maxim smiled.

"Anyway, I worked my way up, got hired as a manager. At that point, after I had worked for about half a year, I went back to the library and found

Vinov. I reminded him that he had told me to come back when I was somebody. ‘Here I am,’ I said.”

Semko smiled. “My life seems very boring in comparison to yours.”

Jansky smiled. The story was mostly true. False parts of it included where he was on July 11. He had been sitting in front of his computer, watching a TV show alone. And he had explicitly claimed to have predicted July 11, though always in contexts where he could walk it back later with “I was drunk and obviously joking.” Jansky could see why the story appealed to Maxim Semko. He was an “aristocrat,” born into his job, the Glanzia Forum, and Maslak’s camarilla. He liked the story because he wanted to believe “meritocrats” like Jansky were merely a different kind of poseur. If Maxim Semko could be described as having a coherent worldview, it was that the economy was all bull, all perception, words. He, like the rest of the Dador employees, never used the phrase “efficient market hypothesis” and might not know what it was, though it had been used a couple of times by other people at the Glanzia meetings. But if he learned about it and was in a position where he could trumpet it, he surely would.

“No shame in it,” Jansky said. “Your mother worked very hard so you could have a boring life. I hope the same for my children.”

Semko smiled. “Speaking of children, have the adults discussed the big question with you, how long Dador will last? Whether the son-in-law will succeed the father?”

Jansky was taken aback. “No,” he said. “Don’t get me wrong, I’ve thought about it. But I’m just focusing on writing papers. Wait until I’ve built up some seniority before asking the big questions.”

Jansky looked at Semko to see if he had any opinion, but he just laughed. “Hell if I know anything, I’m just a secretary. Anyway, I’ve gotta get home, got work to do, but I’ll see you later.” He turned around and walked toward his apartment.

“See you later,” Jansky said, surprised at the sudden reversal of course, though Semko wanting to take a half-day should not have surprised him. He continued the path to the Yamel Tower, thinking about Maxim Semko. Jansky was trying to become close friends with the princeling. There was a difficulty in the fact that Semko had no interest in intellectual topics, no passion for any career path, no talent for tennis or basketball. He didn’t like to talk about his mother, his childhood, or the on-again, off-again relationship he had with his girlfriend. But he liked to hear Jansky tell stories. Sometimes Semko seemed like the stereotypical intense teenage boy who tried and failed to bottle up his emotions. But other times, he just seemed flat and “normal” and Jansky was wary of reading too much into it.

He thought back to an argument Maxim Semko had had with his mother. The Nazis had decreed that inheritances among Reich subjects must be equal between children; it was possible to exclude misbehaving children, but only with an explanation given. Maxim Semko was unaware of this and his mother

lectured him that this was information he absolutely had to know. The argument took place in Maxim's office, next to Jansky's, and the two spoke softly such that Jansky could only barely hear them speak. Had he been listening to music, as he often did during work, he wouldn't have heard it. As far as anyone else was concerned, he *hadn't* heard it. Jansky's hope, which would surprise nobody, was to succeed Alya Semko as the head of the Russian section of Dador. Maxim Semko was too unintelligent to be the leader, but in return for ceding the position to Jansky could get a comfortable income giving his name to papers written by someone else.

He told himself not to get too attached to the fantasy. For it to happen, Dylan Foster had to be succeeded by someone equally able to attract clients to the firm. Robert Pearson, born in the same year as Jansky, seemed to Jansky to be just as smart as his father-in-law. But smarts were only a small part of the picture. Did he have the social graces and connections to keep recruiting clients the way his father-in-law did? The more probable answer was 'no.' And knowledge of the efficient market hypothesis seemed to be slowly seeping into the Reich's common culture, making the task of convincing people to invest harder and harder.

Jansky made it to Yamel, walked through the lobby, and then made his way to the office. The other three employees were there and were (or seemed) busy as usual. He got out his personal laptop, the project laptop securely locked in his desk drawer, and pulled up the latest assignment Semko had given him, self-driving cars. She only wrote a small paragraph and verbally told him that she had decided on the conclusion. The investment opportunity would not be recommended. This was the norm at Dador, done to create the illusion that the investments the firm did make had survived rigorous self-criticism. Jansky wouldn't go so far as to say he enjoyed his "day job." It was in many ways tedious and repetitive. But it wasn't as bad as he anticipated when he accepted it. The papers he produced were like works of art, 'beautiful' in a way that could only appeal to a mind like Jansky's.

He thought about what would happen if self-driving cars were the success their expounders predicted. The German CEO of Mercedes would be feted on TV as a grand innovator. On occasion, he would remind viewers not to forget about the "average man" who was as crucial to the project's success as he was. The TV would go to photos of the average engineer at Mercedes, a German, Briton, or Chinese. The average German viewer, cocooned in his insular suburb, would be under the impression that "Mercedes" invented the self-driving car. If one followed the paper trail, he'd discover something different. Mercedes owned the patents, but they were bought from a company called Carmack.

If our German was to look into Carmack, he'd learn it was founded by a man named Robert Chapman. Chapman, according to his biography on *Koppeln*, the business networking website, was born in London, attended an elite private school, and got his undergraduate degree at Oxford, England's

only elite university. He got married at age 21 and was recruited upon graduation by Mercedes. He moved to Stuttgart and joined the elite track. His goal was divisional manager, the highest position a Briton could realistically aspire to. But after two decades in the business, he decided to go his own way. He believed that self-driving cars were closer than commonly thought and deserved more investment. He resigned from his job and founded Carmack with some wealthy friends as investors. He soon signed an agreement with his old employer. Mercedes would gain the sole right to buy Carmack's intellectual property in return for a small amount of investment. This was necessary due to the regime's system of intellectual property. Subhumans could not own anything. Ordinary Germans and Reich subjects could theoretically submit a patent, but the patent office would almost certainly not respond. One had to be a first-tier firm or have an "association agreement" with a first-tier firm to get a response. And while firms like Carmack could own IP, they could not 'use' it, had to sell it to Mercedes for a "fair" price. Once Chapman had perfected the technology, he entered into negotiations with Mercedes. He had some leverage, the technology was worth billions to Mercedes, but he couldn't demand too much lest Mercedes file an "anti-squatting" lawsuit and force a sale. So he'd do the deal, walk away with 120 million Weltmarks, far more than he could have earned had he stayed at Mercedes. But it was still a fraction of the total value-added, which would be captured by the shareholders, managers, and employees of Mercedes. In this way, the first-tier firms could never be knocked off their perch.

To his friends, Chapman would take exclusive credit for himself and his own employees. He wouldn't mention that the firm has its own "satellite," Nosenko Technologies, led by Mikhail Chesnov. Jansky pulled up the server page for Dador's diagram of Kyiv's tech industry, entitled *The Technology Archipelago*. It was a beautiful document that Foster printed onto a large poster and used to impress clients. The map showed three areas in different colors. The ghetto was medium gray, the "ghetto business zone" that surrounded it was light grey, and the world outside was white. Throughout the ghetto and "business zone" were dots of varying sizes with logos beneath them. The dots represented offices; the more employees an office had, the larger the dot. Clicking on the dot for Nosekno showed 1,748 employees in its only office in the ghetto. A thin line connected it to a smaller dot five blocks outside the ghetto, the only office of Carmack, employing 123 people. Far to the west was a second Carmack office employing 23 people, where Jansky presumed they tested the technology. Nosenko Technologies would do the grunt work of computer programming, while Carmack employees, most of them American, would do the work to test and verify the code being created.

What was happening behind the closed doors of those three offices? There were many possibilities. Perhaps it was all a giant fraud, directed by Chapman. According to *Koppeln*, he was already making three times what a director at Mercedes makes in salary alone. Perhaps he partnered with

Chesnov to pull the wool over his rich friends. Perhaps Chesnov was pulling the wool over him, directing his employees to deceive Chapman into thinking progress was being made while secretly thinking the effort impossible on the current budget. Perhaps Chesnov had faith in it, being deceived by his own employees. Perhaps the management and employees of both firms were deceiving themselves, not thinking about things like rain and snow and ice and pedestrians and flying paper bags and erratic human drivers. Perhaps they actually had the technology and would soon revolutionize the world.

Regardless, Jansky wouldn't put in the effort to go and find out. When he was first hired, he had naively asked Semko if they should go out and try and talk to employees of the firms they are supposedly researching, if not to see but to 'be seen.' But she explained that this would be counterproductive. Firms could in theory forbid their employees from talking to people about any facet of their work and sue them if they do so. Investors, though, don't like this, as it signals a firm has something to hide. But while this prevented companies from openly filing lawsuits, they could still fire workers who leak information while claiming they did so for some other reason. If Dador had a reputation for being nosy, its employees would start being treated as pariahs by at least some people. This negative reputation might spread back to the clients. It is best for the clients to hear that we are doing it, Semko said, but not that anyone is mad at us because they think we *are* doing it.

Jansky will, he decided, write first about the big firms. He thought he'd probably find that amounts the firms claimed to invest into their own self-driving car programs are tightly correlated across firms, indicative of the "Automakers Association" acting to coordinate investment. He will then need to argue this cartel is establishing a minimum rather than maximum for investment in self-driving car technology. The argument for the general case, that when companies collude in this manner, they are promoting rather than restricting investment, had already been made by others at Dador. He will only need to copy and paste. To avoid offending the regime, the first citations will be to the Economic Regulation Board, saying it has found little evidence that firms were disobeying its rules. Nobody with any level of intelligence would put any stock in the ERB as it almost never cites sources in its reports. But these intelligent readers will be reassured by the additional citations of two German economists, Kathrin Winfried and Thorsten Jesper, who made the point more rigorously.

Jansky will then analyze and compare the funding reported to the amounts necessary for other projects, such as the DNA-scanning project. This will be more difficult and he'll conclude by saying such comparisons are "unreliable." He'll then go into much detail about the possibility of computing power suddenly increasing, which he will dismiss as unlikely due to historical trends. He'll include many pages and many paragraphs so that any reader will be too bored to read the section in full. If they did get to the juicy parts, they'd start to hear about Carmack and Nosenko. For Carmack, he'll restate what the man

said on his Koppeln profile. For Nosenko, it would be harder, as the anti-blogging laws prohibit subhumans from writing too much, even about their businesses. Instead, he'll cite "personal contacts" about Chesnov's personality and leadership style but will warn the reader such accounts are "second-hand" and "unreliable." He'll then go into what the employees think about the technology they are developing. He can't name names, which would "compromise his sources." But he'll speak of them in vague, armchair sociological terms. One man is cynical, another self-important, another has a 'titanic hatred for his boss.' Ultimately he'll conclude that they "probably know less than they are saying" and that the firm should neither invest in Carmack nor short it.

Chapter 3

Timur Sergev was born in 1946 in the city of Omsk, Russia. His parents had lived near Moscow and fled to Siberia in 1943. He had an older brother, Yulian, and a younger sister, Nastasya. His parents had been ordinary workers in Moscow and were part of the poorest class of unskilled laborers in Omsk. Timur Sergev grew up in a tiny apartment that was not much different from the plattenbau of the North Kyiv Ghetto, shared with another family. While Yulian Sergev won a scholarship, moved to Novosibirsk, and became a surveyor, Timur and Nastasya did poorly in school and remained in Omsk as unskilled laborers. He worked primarily as a baker's assistant and sometimes did odd jobs for extra money.

All of the family were communists. Nastasya and her parents voted for the unreformed Communist Party, while Yulian and Timur voted for the Trotskyists. Timur Sergev began writing his diary in August of 1968. The diary was dominated by communist sentiments. He found little attractive in the American-influenced direction free Russia had taken. He tried and failed to get a job in the city's oil industry, which according to him, was controlled by a "caste" of workers who had inherited jobs from their fathers and served as the lackeys of the capitalist power in return for slightly higher pay. He argued with his sister and parents about Stalin but still considered them part of his "tribe." He felt nothing but contempt for the national Bolsheviks, monarchists, constitutional democrats, and moderate socialists. When Nastasya married in December of 1968, he was initially worried that the groom was not a proper "socialist." The political segregation of society extended even to death. He and a communist friend were angry that the friend's grandmother, despite being a communist voter herself, gave her husband a church funeral.

Sergev's early diary entries were stilted and full of spelling and grammatical errors, but his talents as a writer would improve over time. He got a job as a baker's assistant and supplemented his income with occasional odd jobs. He continued to live at home with his parents, and the three were

able to escape their building before it collapsed in the nuclear explosion. Nastasya and her husband were not as lucky and were both killed. Yulian Sergev survived in Novosibirsk, spared as the Nazis wanted an intact government that could surrender. Once it became clear that most of America's nuclear arsenal had been destroyed on the ground, the government in Novosibirsk surrendered. Timur wrote no entries between the nuking and the surrender, as it took time to dig his diary out of the rubble. Made homeless by the blast, Sergev and his parents sheltered in a school. His boss had been severely wounded in the blast and could not re-open the bakery. Sergev signed on as a "rubble clearer."

The Germans did not know how long the war against the still-fighting powers of Britain and America would take, so they sent only a token force to "occupy" free Russia. For a time, the government remained in power, the Russian flag continued to fly, and nobody was sure who was really in control. Even the state radio continued to broadcast, though it said little about the still-continuing war, focusing its energy on aid to the many wounded people. Sergev wrote little during this time, perhaps because he was too busy, perhaps because everyone was talking about current events and he didn't find the need to confide in his diary. In August of 2069, he began writing again; the entries dominated a single fear. In return for the temporary normalcy they gave to Free Russia, the Germans demanded it deliver "prisoners of war." They did not take the wounded and it soon became clear that any able-bodied young man could count as a "POW." Yulian Sergev, in Novosibirsk, was one of the men who was abducted and sent off; he would die in unclear circumstances in 1974. Timur Sergev had no special skills or friends in high places and would have been the prime candidate to be grabbed, but he wasn't.

The sense of normalcy continued for a while even after the British and American surrender. The Germans focused their energy on occupying Britain and America, making sure no rump states would arise and threaten Germany. The "occupation" of Omsk began in earnest on September 14, 1969. The occupying troops consisted of a small number of Germans overseeing a larger number of Croats and Italians. They deposed the city authorities and installed a "council" mainly made up of businessmen and the leaders of secular charities. Politicians, military men, and religious leaders were never appointed to the "councils." The occupiers' main priorities were POWs and Jews. Sergev said little about the "Jew hunts" except that the Russian police universally refused to participate. (A questionable claim.) But he had a great deal of fear of being arrested as a "POW." He considered fleeing to the countryside, as many in his situation were doing. But he decided to remain as he had no relatives in the country who could help him. He continued to work as a "rubble clearer," though the work and thus the pay were erratic. Hunger was frequent. In February of 1970, the occupiers announced that all "POWs" had been "accounted for," ending the period of terror.

Sergev and his parents and neighbors had some reasons for optimism as

1970 began. Rubble had been cleared and some buildings had been restored, though lack of raw materials prevented a large-scale reconstruction program. Sergev and his parents moved into a “restored” apartment they shared with another family in March of 1970, while in January, Sergev’s old boss recovered and reopened the bakery, giving him a stable, if low-paid, job. Men from the German DEA oil company arrived in Omsk to size up the assets that remained after the bombing. The oil wells were gone, but the oil underground was still there. The population saw the DEA men as a lifeline that could be used to free their men from the POW camps. But the oil industry did not need that many workers, and nothing could happen until the drilling equipment was imported.

In April, the city unexpectedly received several transports of 15,000 Russians from Manchuria, expelled by the Chinese government. They arrived in sealed boxcars, having been robbed of nearly all their possessions by the Chinese. Perhaps triggered by a “Jew hunt,” some deportees attacked the Germans as the trains were being unloaded. The Germans fired into the boxcars and began a campaign of “reprisals,” killing hundreds, mostly young men who were kidnapped off the city streets at random. The surviving deportees quickly became the city’s poorest class.

By the spring of 1970, armed with a stable job and free time, Sergev began to write his diary on a near-daily basis. The prewar elite in the city, who he had previously hated as “capitalists,” were now to be hated as “collaborators.” There was, however, a key difference. Before the war, he was certain the capitalists would be swept away in the inevitable revolution predicted by Marx. After the war, there was no more talk of this. But hatred of the elites did not require a prediction of their downfall, and Sergev certainly hated them. The “socialist milieu” survived for a time and its members kept hidden red flags and copies of Marx’s writings. Likewise, a “nationalist” milieu kept secret the red-white-blue and black-white-yellow flags, which were just as illegal. But many saw political categories as no longer relevant. Sergev wrote contemptuously of a formerly staunch communist friend who now saw no harm in dating a constitutional democrat.

On September 3, 1970, Himmler announced that Siberia would be freed of its “surplus population.” Sergev considered fleeing to the countryside but decided against it for the same reasons as before: he had no skill for farming and no relatives who could help him. Additionally, the Germans had his fingerprints. They could tell who was a “legal country dweller” and who wasn’t. His attempt to get a job in the slowly-rebuilding oil industry failed, he said, for the same reason as before. The ‘caste’ had excluded him. In July 1971, the “Manchurians” were rounded up and deported. But nobody could predict when the city’s “natives” would be targeted. The Germans seemed to strike at random. Omsk was uneasily safe until, in October of 1973, “reinforcements” arrived. By then, the deportees understood what would happen. Those with connections to important industries or the “council”

would be exempted; the rest would be deported. Rather than trying to escape deportation, Sergev and his parents attempted to be on the first train, reasoning that the best jobs would be taken by those first to arrive. They didn't get the first train but were close, and the three arrived at the Voronezh Transit Camp on October 18, 1973, among the first of 300,000 deported from Omsk. Four days later, after a thorough "Jew hunt," the train arrived in North Kyiv.

Sergev's first diary entry after arrival was a curse against the "collaborators" and the "bigwigs" who had been exempted from deportation and still lived in Omsk. In time, some of them would join him in Kyiv, and he would count them as his trusted friends.

Jansky proofread the section with satisfaction and decided it was time to head out. It was the evening and he had worked productively throughout the day. He re-encrypted the project computer and put it in his desk drawer. His "personal" laptop was also there, but he had carefully covered it with papers. He was to head to the Kyiv Business Association to meet with Juliet Perot and it was a hassle to take computers through the checkpoints. He walked out of the empty office, took the elevator down to the first floor, and walked out onto "Soviet Street." He then walked the short way to the bus stop. *Sovetskaya Street* was easily the most important artery of the ghetto, connecting the Yamel Tower to the western Kripo checkpoint known in the ghetto as the *Sugenlar*. Due to its importance, buses traversed the street more frequently and were permitted to go faster. Pedestrians crossed the street at their own risk, with a few elevated walkways for the frightened and frail. A bus, painted blue and white to indicate its faster allowable speed, arrived after eight minutes. Jansky got on the bus and got a window seat. He was happy that the middle-aged man who sat down next to him didn't want to chat him up.

The bus set off to the west and Jansky stared out the window at the monotonous ghetto skyline. He thought about a story his mother, Masha Jansky, liked to tell people. She claimed she kept her young children in happy ignorance of the nature of the Nazi world. Supposedly Toma Jansky thought that the Ghetto Police were the only police, the Pillar Council was the only government, that the ghetto was "normal." Supposedly he had maintained this delusion right until his tenth birthday when she told him about the Kripo and the Gestapo and the genocide of the Jews. The last claim was an outright falsehood. Every child who sat at the lunch tables with other children had heard of it. He used to tell his mother she was simply wrong but now preferred to remain silent when she repeated her delusion, which she no doubt believed.

It was true on some level that he had been ignorant. He understood the hierarchies he saw, older children above younger children, teachers above pupils. He didn't think about and wasn't interested in that world over the horizon. But what if he had been? He wouldn't have needed to live next to the ghetto wall to notice the ghetto's border. It can be seen from far away, as

buildings within the ghetto are rectangular boxes of varying height, while buildings outside are of varying shapes, with chamfers and spires and facades. If he somehow made it to the edge of the ghetto by catching a bus or stealing a rich child's tricycle, he'd have found his way interrupted by a large concrete wall topped with barbed wire. He'd then turn and ride along the sidewalk next to the wall until he reached the Sugenlar, one of four ghetto checkpoints. If he approached from the South, he'd see a concrete fence providing privacy to an outdoor area where trucks come in and are loaded with goods to be brought into the ghetto. Without understanding what the building was, he'd know there was something ominous about it. Like all buildings in the ghetto, it was unadorned and rectangular, but it was very small, only five stories tall, and it merged with the concrete wall, being about halfway inside and halfway outside the ghetto. Atop the building were two large Nazi flags.

Jansky was disappointed that the diaries did not tell him the origin of the word "Sugenlar." It was an exclusively Russian expression. The Kripo used the simple term "*Westlicher Kontrollpunkt*," western checkpoint. As searching for the phrase on the Reich Encyclopedia gave zero hits, Jansky thought it was either a minor Russian place name the Nazis had not bothered to include or a mispronunciation of some foreign word. The Sugenlar had moved West and increased in size and complexity over time. In the time of the diarists, it was quite easy to go through, with guards sitting to the side and rarely checking identification or conducting searches. At night people were known to throw carpet over the barbed wire and climb over. As the state got richer, it could dedicate more resources to its ideological goals. The fence became a concrete wall with cameras and sensors. Fingerprint, eye, and document scanners were added to the checkpoint. One might get away with smuggling very small items that could be hidden in shoes, but no longer could one show up with a backpack and expect it not to be searched. Most businessmen did not carry briefcases, backpacks, or computers. Instead, they carried "backbags" which could fit only fit papers and were specifically designed for going through checkpoints. Toma Jansky's was light grey.

As the bus approached the Sugenlar, Jansky got his two OST badges out of his backbag and pinned them to the front and back of his business suit. Jansky's backbag had only a single sheet of paper, his official authorization from the KBA to leave the ghetto. It was 7:10 p.m., and most of the people going through the checkpoint were returning to the ghetto, so he didn't expect a long line. Still, he didn't want to take his chances. He got off the bus and walked into the middle section used to exit the ghetto.

The exit section of the Sugenlar was divided into six subsections with twenty turnstiles each. During rush hour all were open, but at the late hour, five out of six were closed, the steel sheet door having been pulled down and locked. Of the sixth, only two turnstiles were open, each manned by a soldier, and Jansky was happy to see that there were five people in each line. He walked to the line to the left. The Sugenlar was everywhere bare and

undecorated, with concrete, steel, and signs warning that this and that escape attempts would be punished with the offender and his family being sent to a KZ. There were speakers built into the ceiling, from which came a lecture about Chinese history. At other times there was music or Nazi rants against “Judeo-Bolshevism” and “subhumanity.” Above Jansky were the second and third floors, where the Kripo conducted annual ‘interviews’ with everyone aged ten and above. Usually this meant the taking of fingerprints, photographs, and DNA samples; very rarely, it meant interrogation. Higher still were the fourth and fifth floors, where the soldiers who manned the checkpoint ate, slept, and played.

As all subhumans must be back in the ghetto by 10 p.m., only oddballs were leaving at such a late hour. Jansky presumed the five men in front of him were workers suddenly called back to their workplaces. Nine out of ten were men wearing business suits. One man wore what Jansky would have guessed was a janitorial uniform. Nobody was making any noise; even during rush hour, the Sugenlar was eerily quiet due to the rumored “interrogation quota.” The soldiers at each turnstile were Hungarians who had been stationed at the Sugenlar for the past fourteen months. The two men looked plain, wearing green uniforms with a couple of patches and medals and green hats with miniature red-white-green Hungarian flags. In ten months, they’d be rotated out and a new group rotated in, perhaps Brazilians, Malays, Arabs, or Frenchmen. The rotations were dreaded, as soldiers at the beginning of their deployment were known to be zealous, mellowing out after a few months.

Jansky reached the front of the line quickly and gave the soldier his identity card, wallet, “work document,” backbag, phone, and the “electronic locator device” all subhumans were required to carry when outside the ghetto. He then looked into the iris camera and placed his thumb in the scanner. The soldier scanned the ID card and ELD, put the document under the photocopier, viewed the picture and his face, then let him through. He walked a short distance, opened the glass door, and exited into the open-air bus station. Unlike the other side of the Sugenlar, the bus station had benches one could sit on, and he sat down as he had some time to kill before he was supposed to meet Perot.

Had Jansky been taken for interrogation, he would have had some difficulty explaining why he had to leave the ghetto. He was not on the Kyiv Business Association’s payroll, after all. He was not doing any value-creating work for them. He would have explained that the KBA needs to coordinate with the ghetto’s pillar council, but he was not officially employed by the pillar council either. He might have spent a few days in jail before he’d have been released. It was possible, Jansky thought, that the purpose of the meeting was for Maslak to test Jansky’s social skills. This was why he had been purposely vague about Perot’s history, job duties, personality, and worldview. Jansky was supposed to deduce it and impress her.

Who was Juliet Perot? From *Koppeln*, he knew she lived in Lorsch, the

neighborhood in West Kyiv where the fashion industry was based. She was born in the Crimean resort town of Teuschnitz, where there was a small community of Americans. Her work history showed a single employer: she had spent eight years with the Meier Club. The Club was connected to but organizationally separate from the KBA, and its Koppeln page showed only the information it was mandated by law to display. It was a for-profit, privately owned business with one location in North Kyiv. Perot's job title was "business associate," which couldn't have been more vague, though Maslak had called her a "party planner." It seemed that her job was to recruit pretty women, invariably her fellow Anglo-Americans, to flirt with the men of the Kripo when they came to the KBA. Most of them were models who worked in the fashion industry. She could do this in part because she was a former model; Maslak had strongly hinted at this. Why else would she have an unlisted work history?

It was no quirk of history that the "fashion industry" was based in Kyiv and was controlled by and mainly employed "Anglo-Americans," the Nazi term for the non-German white peoples of America and the former British Empire they had organized into a single pillar. The Anglo-Americans were "Nordic Aryans," so the Germans could see them as sex symbols without guilt. But they were an alien and culturally inferior people, so the Germans had no concern about their reduction to sex symbols. Though Nazi scientists regarded the Anglo-Americans as more genetically similar to themselves than the French or Italians, they felt culturally closer to the latter, bound up in a common "European" identity. The Anglo-Americans, in contrast, were representatives of an "anti-Europe," a degenerated, individualistic, consumerist culture it attempted to export to the rest of the world. The Nazis, in this thinking, would protect themselves, the Reich subjects, and even the subhumans from their "cultural poison," most notably their promotion of miscegenation, which they tried to push on others while lynching any Negro who looked at a white woman twice.

In the Nazi view, the Anglo-Americans were slowly being purged of their "degenerate" culture. Many in the Anglo-American pillar wanted to move the process along. There was something very pathetic about the Anglo-American mimetic Nazism. The Chinese and Indians who goose-stepped did so while using their traditional flags, symbols, clothing, and music. The Nazis would not let the Anglo-Americans use anything specifically English, American, Canadian, or Australian. They had a flag invented in 1972, a blue, white, and red triband with the white band in the middle being larger than the others. They complimented it with a whole bunch of allegedly ancient Celtic symbolism. The goose steppers had chased the industry out of Britain and America but the Nazis allowed it to exist unmolested in Kyiv, probably to prove the Anglo-American "degeneracy."

Like most people, Perot probably overestimated the importance of her job. Jansky would attempt to feed into this, claiming to believe her efforts

were the lynchpin of the whole operation. He would ask her to share her “insight” into the minds of the Kripo men and the American business class, insight he as a Russian could never acquire. He hoped to turn the wide gulf between himself and Perot into an advantage. Precisely because he was a “racial alien,” she could speak frankly to him knowing his opinion of her did not matter. He’d have to be cautious, though, in expressing his opinion before she expressed hers.

After he decided it was time to go, Jansky started the short walk to the Harren Insurance building, four blocks away down Vanbar Street. Those in the ghetto often used *Vanbar Street* as a metonym for finance. This allegorical meaning allowed Jansky to claim he “worked on *Vanbar street*” even though his two workplaces were not actually on the street. He was disappointed when he learned as a young adult that the “*Vanbar Street*” metonym was only a local phenomenon, probably influenced by the Americans and their “Wall Street.”

The “neighborhood” of “*Vanbar Street*” was oval-shaped, extending from the Sugenlar in the East about twenty blocks west and five blocks north and south. Its borders were defined by the fact that the city forbade new construction inside the “historic neighborhood,” creating an island of small brick buildings surrounded by taller steel and glass structures. Though the buildings were old, they were lovingly maintained, so that *Vanbar Street* seemed like a window into the 2030s. The Harren Insurance building was the tallest building in the “historic” neighborhood, giving it a natural prominence. It was unsurprising that it played host to the Kyiv Business Association.

Around seventy-five percent of those on the street were Russians, distinguished by the standard blue and white *OST* badges they all wore. Most wore business suits; a minority wore work uniforms, being janitors, cooks, or mechanics. The Americans on the street dressed identically to the Russians. Beyond the lack of the badge, Russians and Americans could be imperfectly distinguished by physical appearance. The Russians’ faces were shaped differently, a product of heredity, and the Russians’ skin was paler, a product of environment; the close-packed buildings in the ghetto acting to block out the sun. In addition to Americans and Russians, there were a smaller number of Indians, most of whom wore the same business suits. On occasion, one saw an Indian in a turban, probably someone from India visiting relatives in Indian East Kyiv.

Jansky arrived at Harren Insurance, walked through the first floor, and then up the escalator to the second floor where he came upon the small “waiting room” for the portion of the building controlled by the KBA. The walls were brown and made of marble, the couches tan, the tables black. In front of him was a glass door through which Jansky could see the party going on within. The regulars could open the door with badge scanners, but he would have to get the guard to open it manually. He walked to the desk next to the door, behind which sat three guards of American appearance. He got his

ID and “business pass” and handed them to one of the guards, a somewhat fat but muscular young man. The man looked at him skeptically. Without speaking to Jansky, he looked down and picked up an old corded phone. He said something in English that Jansky could not understand. There were a few minutes of silence, as the man on the phone did not speak, while Jansky silently stared slightly away from him. Then Jansky heard a faint sound from the phone. Whatever had been said looked to have disappointed the guard. He glared at Jansky but said nothing, handing him the documents back.

“Go through,” he said in English-accented German.

Jansky did so and then spent a few seconds looking into the foyer where the party was in full swing. The section of the Harren Insurance building managed by the KBA contained the second, third, and fourth floors. There was the foyer for large parties, some smaller rooms for smaller parties, rooms for formal business meetings, a bar, and the private Meier club. Jansky turned right and walked along the hall. The floors, wall to his right, and pillars to his left were all made of or coated with marble. He reached the stairwell and walked up to the fourth floor. In contrast to the marbled foyer, the hallway resembled any other office building. The walls were painted light gray; above Jansky was the usual drop ceiling. There was nobody in the hallway save for one man walking toward the Meier Club, who did not take notice of Jansky. The club’s door looked like any other, simply spelling out the club’s name. Jansky presumed the location and lack of external flair was intentional, to give the club the cachet of a “secret society.” He turned right and looked for the office number Maslak had given him. He found it and knocked on the door. After a few moments, there was a buzzing sound and the door opened very slightly. He cautiously opened it further until he saw Juliet Perot. He smiled. “Hello, I’m Toma Jansky,” he said.

“Come on in,” she said in perfect German. She reached out and they shook hands. Juliet Perot had green eyes and light brown hair of average length. She was dressed casually, in a sweater and jeans. The windowless office was, by the standards of Vanbar Street, quite small. There was a desk with a mess of papers and a computer monitor and file cabinet. The cube-shaped computer monitor, keyboard, and mouse all looked ancient, not something one would expect of someone with an office in Harren Insurance. The wall behind Perot had many photographs, some of which showed what Jansky thought was her at a younger age. She was quite beautiful. He sat down in the chair facing her desk.

“Jansky, is that Russian?” Perot asked.

“It’s Czech, actually. My great great grandfather was one of the ‘unteachable elements’ deported from Bohemia in the 1950s. But my ancestry is mainly Russian and Ukrainian.”

“I take it you don’t identify as an ‘Easterner?’”

“Nobody does. Most of us call ourselves Russians. In some of the ghettos, there are communities of Kazakhs and Yakuts and so on who don’t seek to

assimilate with us, or who aren't wanted by us. We joke that they live in 'ghettos within the ghettos.' They wouldn't call themselves "easterners," but as Kazakhs, Yakuts, and so on."

"That's what I figured," she said. "We're the same way. I am of French-Canadian and German ancestry but in the grand simplification of the world, an 'Anglo-American.' Only here in the Reich do we accept that identity. In America we're Americans, in Britain Britons, Canada Canadians, and so on."

Jansky smiled. Other "Anglo-Americans" had told him that was true thirty years ago but is not the case anymore. "I've heard the same from many people," he said.

"Indeed. So what's your first impression of me?" Perot asked, smiling.

Jansky was taken aback. "Well," he said. "Maslak has said you're very intelligent." He looked toward the photographs behind her.

She turned around and looked at the photographs. "Those are of me," she said.

"I'm afraid to comment owing to the racial laws."

She laughed. "Maslak tell you I used to be a model?"

"No," he said, smiling.

"What do you think of us, models?"

"I'm rather fascinated," he said.

"Fascinated at what?"

"The economics and sociology of it. How you see the world and are seen by the world."

"How do *you* see us, Mr. Jansky?"

He smiled. "Before I became a financial analyst, I worked as a computer programmer. You know the stereotype. We feel it unfair that a woman with a symmetrical face and the discipline not to overeat can trade on that alone, whereas we need intelligence, talent."

She smiled. "Humor is often used as a means of plausible deniability. We use it to explore ideas with the ability to walk them back with 'it's a joke' later."

"Quite perceptive," he said.

"You're waiting for me to give my opinion, so you can pretend to agree," she said in a toying voice.

"Perhaps," he said. "How about you give your opinion of me, first?"

"Maslak told me you work for a stonk fund. Suffice it to say I know a certain three-letter acronym."

Jansky was impressed at the reference to the efficient market hypothesis and hoped it showed. "Rare to see someone outside the financial service industry reference the acronym."

"You wouldn't expect a woman like me to know about economics, would you?"

"I suppose I would not."

"Do you see us as whorish, the models?"

“I would not use those terms.”

“I get that a lot. Men think it’s low-class to use them. But the behavior does not differ. They would never marry us.”

Jansky darted his eyes back and forth. “Just between you and me,” he said, “Russians are a bit different. We tend to expect rules to be broken, whether social or legal. Perhaps it’s a simple effect of not having a lot of free time. We can’t devote such mental energy to pretending we follow the rules and pretending we believe our associates are following the rules.”

She smiled slyly. “I see what you’re doing. Portraying yourself as my kindred spirit. Hoping I’ll put trust in you so that you can influence me to influence others for your own benefit.”

“That is what I’m doing, in a sense,” he said. “I hope you’ll be flattered by the curiosity I will express. But I am honestly curious. How does the Meier club work?”

“You go into the club and you’ll find two sections, one for Europeans i.e. Americans and Germans and another for Indians. I don’t know much about the Indian section, tell you the truth, segregation between them is very strict. Before you get in there’s a bouncer at the door, but his job is pretty easy because we piggyback on the KBA. You have to get through their door to get to ours. Most of the customers in the European section are young American men who work for the companies that send reps to the KBA. The Kripo men are welcome too. We don’t need to spend money on advertising. Word of mouth does the trick. My job is to provide the *women*,” she said, smiling in obvious reference to the vagueness of her description.

“Elegant,” he said, wishing he had thought of something better to say.

“It is. And I might go so far as to say it’s necessary for Vanbar Street in its current form to exist. Think of it from the perspective of the millionaire’s son who works as a stonk market analyst at Barclays. He’s asked to put in pretty grueling hours. It’s easy to see why his poorer cousin would do it, but why does he? Is it really to afford a Mercedes rather than a Ford? I doubt it. Material incentives cease to matter much at that point. You need something else, something qualitatively different.”

Jansky thought the incentives that mattered were neither material nor sexual but social. The young banker wanted the respect of those around him and the status that came with the job. After all, what provided the incentive for the older bankers who, Perot had implied, were at the club less frequently? But he knew what she wanted to hear. “I’ve long wondered about what motivates these American workaholics. Not as much of a mystery when we are workaholics, given our relative poverty.”

“More farmer, less forager.”

“Yes,” he said.

“You must wonder how I know these bits of intellectual jargon?”

“I do.” He was honestly impressed she knew of the farmer-forager dichotomy and was curious to hear the “origin story.” He was curious even

though he knew the story he'd be given would be colored by hindsight bias if not fully invented.

"It's a long story," she said. She paused and looked like she was contemplating where to start. "When I say I was a model, I don't mean I was a manager of models. I came from the bottom, grew up near Sevastopol. I was in every way typical of the models. My parents called themselves part of the working class, though the reason for their poverty was that they didn't do much work. I didn't much like school, didn't want to be someone's young bride. People in the industry live in Kyiv, vacation in the Crimea. My recruitment seemed fated to happen. One of the first things I learned was this. There is a distinction in the industry between the "glamour mags" mainly marketed to women and the semi-pornographic "body mags" marketed to men. The distinction has blurred over time but was crisp and clear back in the day. Nevertheless, there was no such thing as being involved in one without the other. Anyone who tried to say they won't be part of the body mags, they got blacklisted, and since it was a monopoly, the managers could do whatever they wanted."

"Models never embarked on work slowdowns?"

"No, they wouldn't even know what that word means," she said. She paused and looked like she was contemplating what she would say next. "Speaking of terms of trade, do you think we, the Meier Club, pay the models I recruit?"

From the tone of her voice, Jansky thought he knew the answer she was looking for. "No," he said.

"We do in a small way. If there are hamburgers leftover at the end of the night, the models are welcome to come eat."

"And I take it it's not true that they hope to Germanize?"

"These women aren't the brightest bulbs," she said. "But they aren't that dumb."

Himmler wanted to "Germanize" the Anglo-Americans, a program his successors canceled by raising the bar so high almost nobody could meet it. Jansky took note of Perot's use of 'these women,' potentially a Freudian slip. "So, how would you explain why they come?" he asked. It was little mystery to him, but he wanted to give her a chance to feel like an expert.

"Suppose there was a social club young men could attend. They are not paid to go there. Their parents would not admire them for going there. They would not find jobs or tips on what stocks to buy. But there are women there who are young, pretty, and, let's just say are not held back by traditional notions of female chastity. Would you, Mr. Jansky, describe it as any kind of mystery why a young man would go to this place?"

"I suppose I would not."

"Well, there you go," she said. "The men at Meier are part of an elite. Women see high-status males as you see very beautiful young women."

"I can understand about the Barclays men. What about the Kripo men?"

"That's a very good point. We have a saying that we are 'an ethny unto ourselves.' We know that we're seen as broken, whores. We know the Kripo men see us this way. And we know the Barclays men see us this way. But we keep going. Again, think back to that notional club young men can attend. You think they'd stop going if they learned the women there 'looked down on them?'"

"I'd expect them to keep going." She had a self-interested bias toward believing she was not deceiving the models and had not been deceived herself when she was in their shoes. Despite this, Jansky did believe what she was saying was true. "What happens to them after age forty?"

She laughed. "Thirty is about retirement age in this industry," she said. "They go back to England or Ohio and marry men who pretend not to care about their pasts. They seceded from the ethny but they come back; in fact, they count on it."

"Are they afraid that that option will not always be available?"

She frowned. "Will the world run out of men who have no better options than to marry former models? I don't think so."

He regretted saying it but didn't want to walk it back. And disagreeing with her on one thing could make his agreement with her on the other nine things appear more genuine. "I was thinking more about the pillar," Jansky said. "The goose-steppers. 'Individual actions.' Right now, they are restrained by the Nazis. What if that is no longer the case?"

She frowned. "Our culture would not stand for it," she said.

Jansky had heard similar things from other Americans and from Indians, too. There was a strong desire to believe that one was the master of his own destiny. Perot didn't want to accept that the life she had built for herself in Kyiv could evaporate in an instant based on the decision of one Berlin bureaucrat. "What are the culture's attitudes toward national socialism?"

"It's all a show," she said. "We're a self-confident people, not like the Indians with their inferiority complexes. Sometimes the self-confidence is unrealistic, to be sure. You know, in the 1970s some of us deluded ourselves into thinking that we'd be to the Germans what the Greeks were to the Romans. That they'd assimilate our culture rather than the other way around. They took from us some financial jargon, 'bullish,' 'bearish,' 'stonk market,' and some science fiction themes, and that's about it. And from them, we took nothing."

Jansky felt a shiver of fear down his spine as he thought about whether there was a listening device in the room. But he told himself this was irrational paranoia. He thought she was exaggerating her people's resistance to Nazism. He had met some American Nazi LARPers, and other Americans had told him of their existence. Perhaps these people silently shunned Perot, leading her to underestimate their numbers. Jansky decided he would try and change the subject. "A couple years ago, I saw an incident at the bus station. There were two men in business casual wear, one Russian and one American.

They were obviously friends, cracking jokes and reminiscing about this and that. An American policeman arrested them without incident.”

“KBA meetings with you and Maslak remind you of those men?”

“To a certain extent,” said Jansky, smiling.

“There is an official crime of ‘friendship with a subhuman,’” Perot said. “Really, their crime was doing it *outside*. Had they done it inside, there would be no problem.”

“Even if there are ERB compliance men in the room?” ERB compliance commissars dress in the same business suits as the men they watch over, and Jansky was sure he had been in the room with one at some point.

She smiled. “I could see why someone would be uneasy at the situation. After all, most Americans and Indians are not allowed here, so why are these subhumans? But you must look at it from the Nazi perspective. They see you and Maslak as collaborators, turncoats, helping to hold down your co-racialists. So your presence here is no political problem. I’ve talked to ERB compliance men about this subject.”

“What are they like, the ERB compliance men?”

She said nothing for a few seconds. Perhaps he had unintentionally called her bluff, as she had not actually conversed with them. “In any workplace, there are gonna be people who are experts on different things. In a printing shop, one is an expert on ink, another on glue, another on shipping, and so on. The ERB compliance man is an expert too. But he is an expert on something everyone wishes does not exist, that doesn’t create any real value. He knows that that’s how he’s seen, as a necessary evil at best, a talentless hack at worst. He has a chip on his shoulder about that, and he’s gonna make sure that the chip on his shoulder is not difficult for others to notice.”

Jansky felt some more fear of the room being bugged and decided to let it show.

Perot rolled her eyes. “Come on man; there are no bugs here. Life’s not a TV show.”

“I know, it’s an irrational fear,” he said. He paused, thinking of what to say. “These ERB men, do they like shutting things down? Is it like a game to them?”

“Of course. If you have a laid-back, whatever-works kind of personality, you probably don’t go into the ERB compliance business.”

Jansky thought Perot was wrong about how the ERB compliance men are perceived by their co-workers. To her, the ERB compliance man is the guy who prevents her from getting hired at a first-tier firm due to her sex and lack of elite education. But to the man in the first-tier firm, the ERB is a mixed bag. It does impose regulations that he would rather not follow, but it also protects his job and gives his company cheap capital, tax breaks, a favorable IP regime, and protected markets. Securing the flow of benefits seems a worthy occupation. And the regime was attentive to the risk that ERB compliance officers would be seen as ignorant flunkies by their co-workers.

This was why they made sure compliance officers in tech firms had tech education, in medical firms had medical education, and so on.

“So the fact that they aren’t shutting any of this down should give us confidence, right?”

“Yes. The Nazis have no problem with Russian ‘collaborators.’ And they have no problem with the sex clubs. Don’t tell my boss I used that phrase, but we whisper it to ourselves. After all, if Litzner wanted the clubs and body mags and brothels gone, he could issue a Fuhrer decree and they’d be gone tomorrow. But no, they serve a purpose, and it’s not just a matter of fulfilling the sexual desires of the people in power. It provides a ‘safety valve,’ if people think standard Nazi sexual morality is too oppressive, they get an address and get told to go get it. It also helps in other ways. When Chinese men from China come to the Reich, they often assume the girls in the clubs must be prostitutes. Then they learn that they aren’t and they’re frantically grabbing their phone looking for the nearest club that’s open to Chinese. They go there and usually come back empty-handed. A Kripo man told me this himself. The average man needs to know that in a regime of sexual permissiveness, *he ain’t gonna get invited to the party.*”

“What else do they tell you, the Kripo men?”

She smiled. “I would emphasize that the Kripo men believe what you read in the newspapers. They are Nazis. They all support Nazi policy. The most open-minded, independent thinker is the guy with a non-standard justification for Nazi policy.”

“How do they see you? Do they think of you as someone likely to be pro-Nazi, anti-Nazi, neutral, disinterested?”

“Me as a model or me as the woman who recruits the models?”

“Both.”

“Well, with the models, they don’t talk about anything at all. And that’s by design. At the Meier club, we turn up the music and make it dark, dark enough to see the figure but hard to read lips. The focus should be on looks and external status markers, not on one’s ability to *talk real good*. It’d be very hard to have an intellectual conversation there.”

“And what about with you?”

“They assume I’m, well, like Yuri Maslak. A *kapo*, collaborator, someone whose job it is to keep the larger group of whorish women in an inferior position.”

“Is there any level of fear that a Kripo man may say something he shouldn’t in the presence of these models?”

“A bit. Mostly in the form of dumb jokes. For instance, have you heard ‘the rest is commentary’ jokes?”

“No.”

“Well, here’s one. Adolf Hitler visits the Advanced School of the N.S.D.A.P. He receives a delegation sent by the students. The leader starts asking him questions about the proper interpretation of national socialist

ideology. He answers them happily but after the tenth question is exhausted. He looks to the group and says: ‘my sons: the Jews are to blame for the war. That is the entirety of National Socialism. The rest is commentary. Go now and learn it.’”

“I sense there is a meaning there I must be missing,” Jansky said.

“It’s a cryptic reference to something ‘incorrect.’ Anyway, we tell the models they can’t repeat stuff like that. But it’s not that big a deal.”

They conversed for nearly an hour after that, a lively and seemingly friendly but sometimes nerve-racking conversation. Thankfully Perot never launched into a digression about nuclear strategy or the extermination of the Jews. She wasn’t interested in him but didn’t need to be. It’s easier to become popular by showing interest than by being interesting, he reminded himself. Still, he had a vague feeling she did not like him. She never resumed her story about how she went from an ordinary model to someone who knows what EMH stands for and Jansky sensed she was in no hurry to do so. She was most lively when talking about the models in general rather than herself in particular.

Though part of him wanted to just defer to her far more substantial life experience, another part stubbornly believed that he understood her people better than she did. She went on about how the “forager-like” wealthy American men care about beauty more than anything else, not noticing that when it comes time to marry, most chose women of advanced education, exactly as the eugenicists recommend. “Economists have long puzzled at the rarity of prostitution,” she had said. Jansky thought the obvious explanation was that human males evolved to resist it, though of course he did not say this. At the end of the conversation, he shook hands with her and left with a feeling that she was less important and easier to replace than she thought. He walked down the stairwell, exited the building, and started the walk back to the Sugenlar.

It occurred to Jansky that a part of Perot’s job duties was to meet with wealthy businessmen, and the occasional businesswoman, who wanted to talk about modeling and its seedier aspects but in an “intellectual” manner. She was a curiosity, a novelty, a former model who knew econ jargon. Yuri Maslak was similarly novel. The wealthy businessman has seen the monumental architecture of Berlin, the rivieras of France, and the jungles of Africa. He’s met many exotic people, top Nazi leaders, officials from his own pillar and other subject pillars, and Russians of all classes, from servants to investment managers. But only at the KBA can he meet a member of that strange tribe of subhumans who runs the ghettos his business depends on.

Jansky strolled down Vanbar street, in no hurry to return to the ghetto. An American couple was arguing loudly in English, but he didn’t mind them, for they made the scene more real. He was thinking about the life story of Yuri Maslak, then schmoozing with KBA men. How it epitomized how much, and yet how little, Jansky knew about his friend and patron. There was a story

Maslak wanted Jansky to believe. Yuri Maslak went into the construction business at age eighteen. His early job titles, preserved on *Koppeln*, were modest but grew grander over time. With seed money from his father and his connections to the pillar to speed up building permit acquisition, he was perfectly set up for the business.

The big break came in 2066 when the Nazis announced the Eugenic Protection Decree, designed to increase the fertility rates of the “better” sections of the German and Reich subject populations. Suddenly firms could not employ all those American workers in the towers around Vanbar Street. The less important had to be moved outward. There were catastrophic predictions in the early days. If an office building that had previously housed 2000 office workers could only house 200, the building would inevitably decay and have to be torn down. What actually happened was different. The remaining 200 employees had more elbow room and could live in the same buildings they worked, as could the building’s janitors and security guards. Rather than collapse, the construction industry temporarily boomed as buildings were converted.

Maslak was right there, establishing relationships with prominent businessmen, and soon began to attend the meetings of the KBA, where he got more business. He didn’t design buildings; Russkies couldn’t do that. But when there was a flaw and one didn’t want to deal with the established construction concerns, he, and a small team of cheaply paid Russians, would be there. The story was perfectly logical and consistent. But there was another story that also fit the evidence. Yuri Maslak never made much money in construction. His fortune came from the fact that he was the only child of a rich father. Jansky could think of no experimental test to tell these two narratives apart. Though he realized it could be self-serving bias talking, Jansky felt that if anyone could do it, it would be Yuri Maslak.

Toma Jansky arrived at the Sugenlar and went through the checkpoint without incident. He took off the badges on the front and back of his suit and was happy to breathe the ghetto air again.

Chapter 4

Nora Jansky wore a blue t-shirt, light grey jeans, a bracelet, a brass wedding ring, and a metal hair clip to part her long blond hair backward. She stood in her apartment’s living room, stared at her husband, and attempted the vivacious look of the “glamor mags,” mimicking the photographs Juliet Perot so proudly displayed. After Toma took a few pictures, she switched to the pompous, prideful, intense look of the National Socialist Women’s League. (NSF) He snapped a few photos. “Now do eugenics,” he said.

She shifted to a plainer facial expression. The Nazi eugenic imagery attempted to capture the “natural” ideal, without makeup or posing. He took a

few more photographs.

“Now with the book,” he said.

She picked up his copy of *How To Think Like A Eugenicist* and held it up.

“Turn it more towards me,” he said.

She did so.

“Perfect,” he said.

She walked over to him and he gave her his phone. She flipped through the photos. “The NSF looks good, but the eugenics looks too acted. Let’s try again.”

She resumed posing and he took a few more photographs. It was a Sunday and they were shortly to go to the Glanzia Forum Meeting at Maslak’s penthouse. Toma had spent the day playing a video game, reading a science fiction novel, and watching the children. Nora had spent the day with her friends. She had already dropped off the children with his parents, who watched them every Sunday evening while the couple headed to shmooze with Maslak’s camarilla.

After he finished snapping photos, she came over and looked at the phone again. This time she was more satisfied. “We’ll put these in the album,” she said.

He nodded. “I wonder what they will think, looking at these photos. Not our grandkids but our further descendants, the ones we will never meet.”

“I don’t know that they’ll be very interested,” she said. “Are we interested in our grandparents? I mean, we have their pictures in the albums, but that’s about it.”

“Well, suppose they are interested in us,” he said. “What will they conclude?”

“They’ll see that their great-grandmother looked very Nordic,” Nora said. “That she was, on this instance, mocking the Reich’s media. Their image of the ideal Nordic woman. Which I’m sure will be the same a hundred years from now.”

Toma nodded.

“And I’m sure that, a hundred years hence, it will also be true that the image of the ideal Nordic woman will not be the Germans’ alone. The Italians, Turks, Arabs, even Japanese will have it too. As will we. They’ll notice me wearing blue, which helps to emphasize my blue eyes. They’ll notice that men with blond hair often grow beards and mustaches and long hair in imitation of the Vikings. Those with black hair do that much less frequently. Nobody wants to look like an Afghani.”

“And they might pick up on something else, too. Suppose my *plan* succeeds,” he said in a self-deprecating voice. “I succeed Yuri Maslak, become a member of the Pillar Council. Having a beautiful wife who’s also smart, a reader of books like ‘*How To Think Like a Eugenicist*,’ that certainly helped.”

She smiled at him.

He thought his chances of succeeding Maslak were higher than he was making out, but explaining why would require him to tell her about the time capsule.

She formed her face into the intense look of the NSF once again. “I am posing in preparation for my performance tonight,” she said in a pompous voice. “Much like Hitler did.”

He smiled. In his view, she didn’t need to perform at all, for her real personality was very close to the “character” she played at the Forum meetings. She was beautiful and she was smart. Nevertheless, she did not feel at home there. The obvious distancing factor was sex, she was a woman and most of the Glanzia members were men. But there was more to it than that. She found Glanzia “fake,” the members too interested in signaling their high IQs and climbing the social ladder. Her closest friends were quite similar to herself, young mothers who worked part-time in skilled occupations. They were the people she felt she could be her true self around.

He understood her perspective and, to some extent, was similar. If asked to name his two best friends, he would name Milan Myta and Ilya Valentyn, men he knew from programming school who still worked as code monkeys. When marriage and family didn’t get in the way, they met every Saturday evening in person and played the video game *War of the Peoples* every Sunday afternoon. Around them, he could turn off that part of his brain that was always whispering, “will this advance your career?” But on another level, he felt he could be himself at Glanzia in a way he couldn’t around them. Milan and Ilya were smart in a narrow sense, they could program computers, but they weren’t intellectually curious. They didn’t read fiction or history and weren’t interested in the world outside the contemporary ghetto. He had joined Glanzia mainly out of a desire to advance his career, but that didn’t make the feeling of warmth and friendship he found there any less real. His wife did *not* feel warm and at home there. He continually acknowledged that and thanked her for her participation.

“On the subject of men and women, I thought up a new Fuhrer impression,” Toma said.

Nora smiled. “Do share.”

Toma Jansky, dressed in a red t-shirt and blue jeans, stood up straight and raised his right hand behind his head in the pose of the Fuhrer receiving the Nazi salute. He began speaking in German. “Back during the time of the Anglo-Jewish bourgeoisie democratic *system*, the men of many nations were held hostage by the varieties of women’s irrational and emotion-driven nature. I have been thinking as of late about how one could have alleviated the unfortunate situation. Men have long observed that women’s level of irrationality and rises and falls in a monthly cycle. Scientists have observed something called menstrual synchronicity, the women’s dormitory effect. If it can occur on the level of a dormitory, can we not make it happen on the level of a nation? Imagine if the bourgeoisie democracies had, rather than a national

scientific project to bring the world to the brink of destruction through nuclear weaponry, instead put their scientists to work to make this happen. They could have set the election date to correspond with the time when women are least likely to be driven into irritable tirades. Have your cake and eat it too!"

Nora laughed, leaned forward, and kissed her husband. "This is the best timeline. That we have that kind of character as Fuhrer," she said. "It's a good thing that the Germans prefer their leaders to have a personality, unlike the Japanese."

Hans Litzer, Fuhrer of the Greater Germanic Reich, was eighty-three years old. In his fourth decade of Fuhrerdom, Litzer had likely gone through many speechwriters over the years, but the tone never changed. It was very different from that of his predecessor, Michael Baumann, who spoke in a stately, factual, objective manner. Litzer was pompous, grouchy, and sarcastic, like every family's cranky uncle. "Pygmy" was his favorite word.

"I would say," Nora said, "that your ability to mimic Litzer is unlike anyone I've ever seen. Sure, people at parties would try to do it, mimicking Litzer's voice to a tee, but the content was very different. Cartoonish, a strawman of Litzer, things the real Litzer would never say. You say things that are only a touch more radical than the stuff Litzer actually says."

Toma smiled. "I wonder if it has a subconscious effect on people," he said. "Those who, in their rational minds, think that I have no insight into Litzer, in their emotional minds feel I must have some mystical connection with the man, and with it an ability to predict what he will do next."

She smiled. "If anyone in the ghetto has insight into Nazism, I think it's you. You changed my mind on a lot of things."

They hugged silently for some time. When he first met Nora, she had many ideas he thought were inarguably wrong, but she changed her mind quite quickly. She had believed, for instance, in the possibility of technological unemployment and the resulting 'extermination as Jews' of the superfluous Russian workforce. Now she thought that if that ever happened, it would be two generations away, at least. He had considered that she was pretending to change her mind but thought it unlikely. She not only agreed with him but repeated his ideas back to him in a manner only possible if she understood them quite deeply.

"And," Nora said, "I think you've convinced others as well. My mother always thought it quite possible that barricades were gonna go up around Berlin. The Indians and Chinese and Americans are gonna revolt, inviting us to join in, any day now. She'd make her case. I'd tell her she's wrong. Then a few months later, we'd have the same conversation. Then you told her she was wrong, and we stopped having the argument. Didn't say she changed her mind, but I think she did."

"People rarely admit to it, unfortunately," he said.

"Suppose you were charged with making the best possible case for a bad argument, the case for a rebellion, not in a hundred years but here and now.

What would you say?"

Toma thought silently for some time. "I'd use the standard argument is bulls*** historical parallels, Rome being the most popular," he said. "I would say the best argument that they aren't omnipotent is that they aren't acting like it, and they're in the best position to know. Consider the sitcoms. The subjects are usually Anglo-American or French, less often Chinese or Indian, never German. And they are always working-class. The sitcom world is a working-class world. The first-tier American family has one car, the German has two, the people in the sitcoms commute on busses from apartment block to apartment block where they drink Vesa beer and look forward to their annual KdF retreat. Cars are not seen, nor are they advertised. Why? Because they're afraid of the working-class Reich subject becoming conscious of how screwed-over he is. Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living. No society has ever deliberately looked away from itself so much as that of the Nazi Germans. This is strong evidence they feel themselves vulnerable."

Nora smiled. "What's the real explanation for why the sitcoms are the way they are?"

"It's about making sure the German people 'appreciates' all the things the Nazi government does for them. Just as we lecture the kids about how they should appreciate the good life we give them. They don't give a s*** what *Sanjay* thinks. Also, there's the fact that it's easier politically. Suppose you're a German sitcom producer considering a sitcom with German characters living in a German world. You'd be continually burdened by worries over ideological correctness. Is this depiction the correct way men and women are supposed to relate to one another? Can you portray German kids talking back to their teachers? Can you make jokes about certain failures in the eugenics policies? The Hitler Youth? It's easier to just withdraw into a distant world. The working-class Reich subjects are that world. Another is the SciFi land."

She smiled. "Glad we practiced this first."

A common exercise in Glanzia was steel-manning, attempting to formulate the best argument for a position one doesn't hold. It did not come naturally to Nora the way it did to her husband.

"Shall we go now?" he asked.

"Yes," she said.

They turned to the door and started the short walk to Maslak's penthouse, which was located in a building called Shapoval 150. The weather was almost perfect and it was still very bright out. Many people were out and about, hoping to soak in the last few hours of leisure before the work week started again. The couple was dressed casually as per Glanzia Forum policy. The official Forum meetings were held every other Sunday. On the alternating Sunday was a larger party most members attended as well, where they brought their wives and children and met members of the camarilla who were not part of the Forum and were uninterested in the intellectual discussion. The couple arrived at Shapoval 150 and walked through the front lobby, facing the

security man who sat at a desk and guarded the glass door that protected the important people inside. The young man had tanned skin, dark hair, dark eyes, and a vaguely Central Asian look. He had been there ever since Jansky met Maslak.

Toma Jansky put his thumb in the scanner, knowing the drill. A few seconds later, he heard the sound of the door unlatching. He then went through. The guard was looking down at a magazine and Nora could have raced through the open door that instant, though she had no need to. Toma allowed the door to close, she put her thumb in the scanner, and the door unlatched. The security system had the couple on a whitelist to enter only around 6:30 p.m. on Sunday; they couldn't just drop in on Maslak unannounced. Jansky wasn't sure whether the elaborate precautions were rational responses to the possibility of crime or assassination or just a symbol of wealth. There was little crime in such buildings, but perhaps that was *because* of the security systems, as imperfect as they were?

Toma and Nora got in the elevator and pushed the button for the twenty-fifth floor. They got off and faced two doors, one for the stairwell and the other for Maslak's penthouse. The door to the latter was nothing special, brown and of the same size as those in any middle-class apartment with a doorbell to the left and an electronic key-reader to the right. But the fact that there was one door on an entire floor told you it housed a very wealthy person. Jansky rang the doorbell. A second later, the door opened and they were met by Maslak's butler, a man of around fifty with grey hair and an ugly face. He welcomed them in.

The frontmost portion of Maslak's apartment contained a room with a television, chair, and couch. To the left was a bathroom; to the right was a small kitchenette. The area was decorated in a warm, homely style, with wholesome (and rather cliched) paintings of fields, mountains, and figures from Biblical legends on the walls. Directly ahead of the Jansky's was the door to the rest of the apartment, propped open at the time. The front room could fool nobody into thinking the apartment was small, as it took up the entire floor. But Maslak could use it to signal that he was a private person. The first time Jansky met him, they met in the front room and went no further. He was "in Maslak's penthouse," yet not really in Maslak's penthouse, not in the part where the children played. Toma and Nora walked down the hallway, then turned right and then left into the large dining room where about half the members were already gathered.

The dining room was large and unusually high, with an ancient chandelier hanging from the coffered wooden ceiling. The ceiling was supported by wooden pillars in the ancient aristocratic style. When Jansky read the diaries that detailed the lives of the ghetto's elites, Maslak's dining room was what he thought of. On one wall hung an impressive painting of the Saint Petersburg harbor circa 1800. The servants had removed the dining table and brought out more padded wooden chairs for the members, who would number around

twenty people. There was a small table where people could pour themselves hot tea or coffee or take wine or beer from the cooler. Nora got herself some tea and the couple sat down and waited for the rest of the members to arrive. The doors to the dining room were open and would remain open for the entirety of the meeting. This, Maslak had told him, was intentional. Any member, or one of Maslak's servants, could have brought in a listening device; nobody had been searched upon entry. The meeting was *not* a private place and the members could not forget that.

There was a somewhat fuzzy generational divide within the Forum. In their forties and fifties were the old guard who joined when or shortly after it was founded in 2069. They were Yuri Maslak, Ivan Vinov, Alya Semko, Timur Semko, Vladimir Egorov, Lazar Orlov, and Pavel Kolov.

Ivan Vinov, who was drinking a beer and staring into his phone, was forty-nine and had short blond hair, blue eyes, and a broad, Slavic face. If Maslak was its official leader, he, the original leader, was the unofficial second man. He was the only one who disagreed, politely but firmly, with Maslak, and even then, it was rare. Everyone in the group respected him as the smartest member, including Jansky. He remembered a time when he once praised Vinov's intelligence to Nora, who responded by rolling her eyes and warning him he was "humble-bragging." She had a point. The average man meets people smarter than himself all the time. Saying "this man, alone, is surely smarter than me" implies you are well above average. Which Toma Jansky did believe, though he tried to hide it.

Vinov spoke to the group with a nerdish charisma and enthusiasm. His speaking style contrasted with Jansky's relatively flat tone, which he was slowly modifying, though he didn't want to look like he was obviously mimicking the man. Vinov, as the group guru, often asked and answered many rhetorical questions. This was a practice Jansky had to remind himself *not* to mimic, for he was not their guru, not yet. Vinov wrote summaries of the Glanzia Forum's discussions, with names and Maslak's know-it-all behavior left out, to place in the time capsule along with his sociological observations he continually added to his never-quite-finished book *The Russians of North Kyiv*. Vinov had worked for Dador Capital in the past but had "voluntarily resigned." As he got along fine with Semko, Jansky assumed it was Dylan Foster who wanted him gone. After that, he worked for a time as one of the group's "professional intellectuals" before Maslak got him his job as a librarian.

Pavel Kolov, aged forty-seven, was one of the Forum's professional intellectuals. He had short black hair, green eyes, and an ugly face. He was not that intelligent but was not arrogant like Maslak and was willing to accept criticism. He had trained as a computer programmer and had several failed startups before Maslak employed him as a paid thinker. It was also his job to recruit new members, most of whom were young, new money tech CEOs. In addition to recruiting business leaders, Kolov occasionally went to places like

the Atlantica Forum, Jansky's old stomping ground. He had heard Jansky's speeches there, though Jansky did not know it at the time. As far as Jansky was aware, no "diamond in the rough" was recruited this way. The way Jansky had joined, by going up to Vinov and asking point-blank, was, as far as he knew, unique.

Alya Semko, Jansky's boss, had short brown hair, blue eyes, and a broad and rather pretty face. She was quiet and guarded, even by the standards of the rather nerdish forum. Her husband, Timur Semko, was another member and the owner of a small FinTech contracting company. He was tall and handsome and the most "Anglophile" of the members, speaking fluent English. Jansky's co-workers, Orlov and Egorov, were also members of the old guard. Moreso than their boss, they liked to mock the "idiocy" of the financial industry. They often made reference to video games and works of science fiction that Jansky did not know, but apart from that, he felt fairly close to them.

It was quite easy to imagine the club's young founders, Vinov, Kolov, the Semkos, Egorov, and Orlov, as members of a nerdish book club in 2069 North Kyiv. That was, Jansky hypothesized, what the Forum originally was. Others deviated from the standard personality; these were people brought in by Maslak. Among them was Koloda Sorokin, the second man in the Zoning Department who was forty-seven years old. He had black hair, brown eyes, and a robust face. He was usually quiet at the meetings and sometimes seemed almost pained when the conversation turned to topics like science fiction or video games that did not interest him. But when it came to his area of expertise, real estate or zoning law, he was lively and showed great intelligence. Another man with a similar personality was Fedor Panko, aged fifty-seven, who headed the anti-poverty department. He was probably the stupidest member, a well-meaning man who seemed to think in cliches. He loved to remind people he was born into poverty but rarely mentioned how he climbed out of it: through marriage. Jansky could imagine the other members debating whether to kick Panko out, with someone saying: "the simple fact is that this guy has power over the pillar. We don't. If we want to change pillar policy, influencing him is the best chance we have."

The younger generation included two who were "born into" the club, Artur Panko, age twenty-six, and Maxim Semko, age twenty-five. There might have been more if not for the tendency of intelligent people in the older generation to have few children or have them late in life. Kolov had never married, Egorov married but had no children, Orlov had a son and a daughter who were uninterested in the club, the Semko's had one child, and Vinov became a father at forty-two.

Most of the younger members were current or former tech industry CEOs recruited by Kolov. Every three months or so, the group had a meeting that was "open," where two or three observers would be invited to attend and nobody could disparage the "aristocracy." Usually the observers decided not to pursue membership, even if they found the club to their liking because it

took time and CEOs didn't have much time. But if they come away liking the idea of the club, it helped maintain its cachet as the meeting place for the "smartest people in the ghetto."

The most prominent member of the younger generation was thirty-four-year-old Gena Orlyk, the other "professional intellectual." He was an illustration of the way new money becomes "old" over time. His father Nikita was born to parents who worked in a Konigsberg fish-processing plant. His mother was from a family of doctors. Nikita got rich and joined A.F. Club. His son was a member of both A.F. and A.G. Orlyk had privately confessed to Jansky that he had never had a "real job." First he worked as his father's "assistant," then for a time as a "philanthropist," until Maslak hired him as a "professional intellectual;" unlike Kolov, he received only a token wage. Despite this, he was very smart and Jansky wondered if Maslak would ever invite him to contribute to the time capsule.

As the clock struck six-thirty, the meeting began. Chairs had been carefully arranged, with one semicircle with most of the chairs facing a smaller semicircle with four chairs for the prominent. Ivan Vinov and Yuri Maslak were at the center of the prominent semicircle, flanked by Kolov and Orlyk.

"Tonight," said Maslak, beginning the meeting, "we'll be discussing taxes, everyone's favorite subject. This book," he said, holding a large, orange and black colored paperback, is entitled "'Taxation of Subhumanity, Estimations, Collections, Evasions.' Ivan is the one who actually read the book and will be doing the main presentation," he said, turning to Vinov.

The room was quiet, with only sips of beer and tea and all eyes on Vinov.

"This book was published by the Nazi party," Vinov said. "It is one of their 'bragging books.' The reader is supposed to recognize the genius of the Nazi system. While mostly the media wants us to think of the SiPo as omnipotent, this book goes out of its way to emphasize the opposite, how it does so much with so little. There are no numbers quoted, unfortunately. But we can add our own. 368 million Germans ruling over 12 billion non-Germans, including those in foreign countries. In this ghetto there are 2.9 million people, with another million in the southern ghetto. And how many SiPo men are there?" He turned to Maslak, the recognized expert on ghetto governance.

"The number I hear is one thousand," Maslak said.

"One thousand," Vinov said. "Of whom probably the majority are spying on the Americans and Indians. Maybe 200 are focused on the ghettos, plus another 200 Americans at the anti-corruption office and a thousand soldiers stationed at the checkpoints. 1,500 people keep a tight leash on four million. I have little doubt that the author would have added exact numbers were the censor to allow it. The basic problem is how to extract taxes with minimal manpower and without creating a bunch of perverse incentives. The basic idea is that they give the tax bill to the pillar and the pillar is responsible for

making sure everyone pays up. If someone ‘disappears’ and cannot be found to pay their taxes, the pillar must make up the difference. So if you evade your taxes, you aren’t depriving the Nazis of revenue. You’re just being a parasite off of your own people.”

“How do the Nazis determine the bill? The head tax is simple enough. Look at the population, look at the age structure, calculate the bill. People occasionally toy with the idea of not reporting births, but the rewards for reporting this are so high as to give us confidence it never occurs. Faking death is also not possible. The book goes into ‘death verification’ in grisly detail. The land value tax is relatively simple: they look at the land outside the ghetto and ‘extrapolate’ inward; the pillar is presented with one bill for the entire ghetto and can do internal valuation itself. The income tax is where things start to get difficult. They have confidence in incomes that are reported by large institutions outside the ghetto. If Cagosoft pays me 50,000 Weltmarks to do some software project for them, that counts as ‘base income,’ which is easy to check because the firm and the bank have a record of paying me that; I can’t just say I got 40,000 instead. Then there’s the ‘excess income,’ which is easier to evade. Imagine a dentist and a private school. The dentist provides discounted or unreported visits to school officials, and in return his kid gets a ‘scholarship’ to attend the school for a reduced price. Both the school officials and the dentist report incomes that are artificially low. Because of this, the Nazis don’t trust the self-reported data for ‘excess’ income and don’t rely on it to impose actual taxes. Instead, they estimate the ‘excess’ income themselves and then hand the bill to the pillar. The pillar has the job of estimating everyone’s income and collecting it all. If the amount they can kind falls short of the ‘estimate,’ the pillar has no choice but to impose an additional surcharge on all the income it is aware of.”

“How do they determine the ‘excess’ income?” Vinov asked. “The naïve solution would be to just look at the average base income and extrapolate it to everyone else. But that doesn’t do. The dentist might have comparable value-add to the computer programmer, but the maid certainly doesn’t. They know this. Another possibility: look at the ratio of dentists’ income to programmers’ income. If the dentist only reports some of his income, the dentist/programmer income ratio will appear unusually low relative to what you see outside the ghetto. But dentists can just pretend to be maids. The Nazis don’t have the manpower to go into the ghetto and check. What can they do? What data do they have confidence in? This is where we get to the point where we ask: ‘how reliable is the author?’ We know they have the ghetto’s population and age structure. We know that they know what we import from the outside world and how much we pay for those deliveries,” he said, looking to Maslak for confirmation.

“I’ll just say they do their jobs,” Maslak said. The “goods-moving” portions of the Kripo checkpoints were black boxes to most people, a subject they knew not to ask about. But there seemed to be no fear in hearing

Maslak's cryptic implication that one *couldn't* smuggle things.

"And we are told," Vinov continued, "that they have 'very reliable' data on income and spending levels by profession from some non-subhuman group. Whether they are Germans, English, French, we don't know. In theory, these people aren't cheating on their taxes. Perhaps there is one district in Ohio that is under extraordinarily intense surveillance. More likely, they pulled the data out of their a**. But anyway, what they do with this supposedly 'reliable' data is construct a 'tree.' At the bottom are the people in the "base" economy. For the programmer at Cagosoft, you take the spending data and estimate 'how much does he spend on dentistry?' You do that for every person who is part of the base income group. How many dentists does that translate to, and how much do they make? Then take the dentists and ask 'how much are they spending on this and that,' etcetera etcetera, until you have all 2.9 million people in the ghetto in this 'tree.' Because they know the ghetto's population and how much wheat, cement and copper wire we import, and so on, they can 'tune' this model until it gets the 'right' value."

"What about the things we're obviously not spending our money on, like international vacations?" Kolov asked.

"There's a chapter on that very question," Vinov said. "And they don't, supposedly, just chuck that out and assume they spend 3% more on everything else. Instead, they think: 'well, what's a substitute for this?' Athletic clubs? Video game subscriptions? It's rather funny how they look at us through this lens of 'hypothetical sociology,' as if we are some future mars colony. The idea of actually coming in here and doing 'field research' apparently hasn't occurred to them."

"Or maybe it has and the Kripo wouldn't let them do it," said Kolov.

"Possibly," Maslak said. "But then, maybe they see field research as an unskilled labor job, preferring armchair analyses from their air-conditioned offices."

"Plausible," Vinov said. "I have a funny crackpot theory," he said, smiling to signal that one shouldn't take what he was about to say too seriously. "The book was written by a man in the RTA, Reich Tax Authority, which largely employs academic economists. Whereas the Kripo largely recruits from the Wehrmacht. There must be a rivalry between them. This book might just be a LARPy, wish-fulfillment fantasy by these academics, who want to tell their wives they are important and influential. When in reality, they're just armchair theorists nobody outside their academic caste is listening to. The Kripo just pulls the "tax estimates" out of their a**es. They don't listen to the eggheads."

"Why would the Kripo permit this to be published, then?" asked Gena Orlyk.

"Keep the non-Germans confused. Keep them guessing," Vinov.

"You could probably figure out if they were making up numbers carelessly," Egorov said.

“Yes, you can falsify certain simple models,” Vinov said. “For instance, it’s not the case that they just take the base income and extrapolate it. In some ghettos, the base income will rise by 3.2% and the excess income estimate will only rise by 1.9%. I could do a rigorous statistical analysis, but just from eyeballing it, there’s no pattern of sudden discontinuities around zero, the base income might rise by .3% yet the excess income estimate can fall by .6%. I think what’s most likely is that they are using some sort of model, but also that they cheat; they glance at the ‘real’ data once in a while, which they aren’t supposed to do. Part of the reason I doubt it’s just ad-hoc, pull a number out of one’s a** is that Nazi ideology tells them they should spend a great deal of time and resources on social control. Recall all the effort they went to create substitutes for dental gold. Was the use of dental gold as untraceable currency really that big of a problem? I don’t think so. It was ideology driving it. They said it could theoretically be a problem and once they conceded that, they said, ‘we can’t just sit here, gotta do something!'”

“Do they do anything to prevent economists from looking at the ‘real’ data?” asked Kolada Sorokin.

“The economists who make the estimates have their computers monitored,” Vinov said. “One can imagine ways around it. Imagine the German economist relaxing at an Italian resort. He goes into a bar and meets an Italian who looks poor, tattered clothes and all, and says, ‘hey, I’ll buy you some drinks if you go to the internet café, buy some time with your debit card, and look up this data on taxation of the subhumans.’ The Italian sits there thinking ‘wow, these Germans really are crazy.'”

The group laughed collectively.

“One thing that’s very valuable about this book,” Vinov said, “is that it allows the Nazis to say things about us that they can’t say openly about the Reich subjects. They “recommend” that our pillars adopt certain tax collection practices. They can openly justify the recommendations by saying that we are corrupt, that we’ll cheat not only them but our fellow subhumans too. They also recommend the same policies to the subject pillars. And if they have the manpower to make it happen, it won’t just be a recommendation but a requirement.”

“Take the example of supermarkets. One form of tax evasion is the overreporting of business expenses. A supermarket buys products and only sells 97% of them, saying the remaining 3% was lost to theft or waste, milk going bad and the like. But actually, the store owners are taking it home or giving it to their employees in return for accepting lower wages. So the employees’ wages and the store’s profit look artificially low. How does the Kripo handle this? Do they have to tell the store, ‘okay, show us the empty milk cartons!’ Do they need to hire informants to apply for jobs at the supermarket? No. What they do is they tell all retailers, ‘you have 1.23% shrinkage.’ That’s the exact number. And if a supermarket says it really does have a 2.23% shrinkage, too bad, it has to pay taxes as if it did sell an extra

1% of its stuff.”

“Don’t they also do something like that with restaurants?” asked Egorov.

“Yeah, it’s more complex in that shrinkage is harder to estimate there. With milk, they can ask, ‘how many cartons did you buy and how many did you sell?’ Not so easy to do that with flour and baked bread. For restaurants, they just assume that for every twelve-hour shift the workers do, they get 2.5 free meals. Providing this is entirely legal. Restaurants can also not do so, but they’d get taxed as if they did.”

“How do they value the meals?”

“2.73 Weltmark per meal, or something like that, I forget the exact number,” Vinov said. “A flat rate because the ‘util’ value to the employee is assumed to be less than the market rate, as he has no choice in the matter and will get sick of the food eventually.”

“What’s even the point?” Panko asked. “Your restaurant worker is getting paid 6 WM and paying 5 WM in head tax. Give him a few more pfennig and income tax doesn’t kick in. This seems like an exercise in social control more than anything else.”

“The worker isn’t paying income tax, but some of the high-end chefs and the managers are. You’d have to draw the cutoff line somewhere and one can always go from over to under by cheating.”

“Aren’t restaurants basically required to give free meals?” Semko asked.

“Maslak would know,” Vinov said.

Maslak jokingly looked side to side, then pressed his fingers to his lips. After a second, he drew his fingers down. “There’s nothing in the law code on that,” Maslak said. “A lot of people are certainly of the opinion that a restaurant that didn’t give its workers that benefit would get extra visits from the health inspectors. It’s not exactly illogical. Restaurant workers expect to receive this benefit and if a business doesn’t give it to them, you’d expect them to be more likely to spit in the food. But as to if it is actually happening, what would I know?” Maslak spoke as if to leave little doubt that he did actually know and that the requirement did exist.

The meeting continued with Vinov going into more detail about the book, with Kolov, Maslak, and, less often, other members asking questions. He discussed the land value tax calculation, why the Germans reject consumption taxes in most instances, and whether the book mentioned the possibility of having a Reichwide Russian pillar to better coordinate tax collection. (It did not) After about an hour of the “sermon,” the members began standing, walking around, and conversing in smaller groups.

Toma and Nora spent most of the time conversing with two other people from the “younger generation,” Soso Isayev and Dima Melov. Both were tech startup founders and both were wealthier than Jansky, though not nearly as wealthy as Maslak. They spoke about the North Kyiv startup scene and the Jansky couple’s earlier discussion about why sitcoms did not depict Germans. At 9 p.m. Maslak ended the meeting and politely asked the members to wind

up their conversations, which they all did. The Jansky's continued to converse with Isayev and Melov as they took the elevator down to the ground, but upon exiting the buildings, they went different ways.

As the Jansky couple walked a block to the bus stop that would take them south to pick up the children, Toma decided he was happy with how the meeting had gone. Once he was sure they were out of earshot of Isayev and Melov, he turned to Nora.

"You think they liked me?" he asked.

"Yes," she said.

It was a relief. He had earlier been worried at what he thought was hostility from Isayev and Melov because of the unorthodox way he had joined the group. Was he really "qualified" for the group? Did they see him as a "blowhard" who got membership by kissing up to Maslak? If they did, Jansky was pretty sure it had evaporated. Jansky would need their support if he wanted to lead the club in the distant future. The younger generation of the Glanzia Forum had no natural leader apart from Orlyk, who would be hobbled by his lack of "real-world" achievement. But for now, Jansky thought, he would need to go to the meetings, mostly remain silent during the "sermons," and defer to the older, higher-status members. After a decade or two, he'll find himself in charge. Or maybe not. Either way, he'd be happy with his life.

Chapter 5

Toma Jansky sat behind his desk at Dador and stared into the Academy website, where all publicly available academic papers were indexed. He was reading the latest paper by Jon Kjeldsen, a German professor at the University of Copenhagen. The paper, entitled “Leisure Consumption as Signalling,” focused primarily on the tourist industry of the Adriatic region. Kjeldsen wrote about how wealthier Germans avoid the KdF retreats of Dalmatia in favor of those in Albania and Greece. They did so even as the latter were, by any objective means, no better. Distance from the proles was the main factor. Jansky could easily imagine the ghetto’s own upper-class behaving similarly, though they didn’t need to. A.G. Club(for the “old money”) and A.F. Club(for the “new money”) were infinitely superior to the athletic clubs attended by the middle class, while the working class had nothing at all.

Jansky had been reading Kjeldsen and the circle of German economists he was the apparent leader of ever since he got hired at Dador. At first, this was to find articles to “decorate” his reports with, but he was so impressed he began reading articles for pleasure. He was surprised at the mocking tone that Kjeldsen and his friends could get away with. Some, though not Kjeldsen himself, made references to “questions we do not have the data to answer,” clearly referring to political censorship. He thought that if he knew of this group, the Gestapo probably knew as well, but nothing was done to stop it. Perhaps Kjeldsen had friends in high places. Perhaps it was a “honey trap.” Or perhaps the Gestapo did not consider a group of would-be iconoclasts who didn’t go any farther than inside jokes in obscure academic journals important enough to suppress.

The regime made it impossible to download articles, and any attempt to mass copy them would require a computer program to operate at the same time it was connected to the internet, which Vinov had strictly forbidden due to the risk of spyware. The only other way to get the papers into the time capsule was to subscribe to receive physical copies of the journal Kjeldsen was associated with, the “Copenhagen Economics Review.” Given the journal’s contrarianism, Jansky decided a paid subscription was risky in a way reading it online was not. Jansky had considered writing an in-depth analysis of the Kjeldsen clique after he finished *Prison of the Nation*, which would include a few articles he’d copy manually. Vinov, however, had scoffed at the Kjeldsen clique as unintelligent and unimportant and Jansky needed to defer to him as the expert.

As Jansky was having these thoughts, a sound emanated from the wall that made his blood run cold. First, there were three bangs on the external office door. Then came the sound: “police, open up.” For a fraction of a second, Jansky asked himself if the man could have been banging on some office’s door. No, he thought. He knew where it came from. His thoughts went

to the computer he used for the project that was safely locked in his desk. If they seized it and gave it to a technically competent person, the jig would be up. He told himself he shouldn't worry too much. He had Maslak on his side and the pillar government didn't include many technically competent people. As he stood up and prepared to open the door, he realized he was being paranoid.

They weren't coming for *him*. Orlov, Egorov, or one of the Semkos were guilty of adultery, which had been criminalized in all the ghettos since 2031. The Nazis didn't profess to care much for the subhuman victims of cuckoldry but thought that marital drama damages worker productivity. It was possible for couples to, at the start of the marriage, "opt out" of enforcement, but few did so. Jansky would not have thought of any of his co-workers as adulterers, but that seemed the most logical explanation. The other one, tax evasion, seemed less likely. Though perhaps they were being questioned about someone else's tax evasion scheme. Jansky opened the door and walked out to the office's main room, as did the other four employees. Alya Semko did the honor of opening the door. A policeman walked in and smiled at the five of them. He wore the standard policeman's uniform: jeans and a light coat of the same dark blue color, with a baton, taser, and bronze "GP" badge with a number underneath. He looked around forty, with balding blond hair. He reminded Jansky of his old gym teacher, tough but friendly. For a few seconds, he looked at each person, then he looked at Jansky and didn't look away.

"Hello," the policeman said, "I am officer Pavlov. I was told that I was to escort Mr. Toma Jansky to have a conversation with one of my superior officers at our office downstairs," he said. He spoke with the tone of a deliveryman explaining when a shipment would arrive, calm and helpful, not expecting confrontation.

"I wasn't aware there was any police station downstairs," said Alya Semko. She looked nervous.

Pavlov smiled. "It's not very large, but officers are stationed there to coordinate with the pillar."

"Am I under arrest?" Jansky asked.

"All I was told was that one of my superior officers wants you there and that it is not optional. I was told I do not need to use the handcuffs so long as you are cooperative."

Jansky took a deep breath and hoped he looked brave. "I take it your superior officer did not tell you what, if anything, I have been accused of?"

"He did not," Pavlov said. He was starting to look annoyed.

Jansky stood motionless for a second. His backpack with his computer was still in his office. "Alright," Jansky said. "You lead the way."

Pavlov smiled and they walked out of the office, then down the hall where they stood and waited for the elevator. Jansky was relieved Pavlov made no move for his computer. They could always send more officers to seize it later,

assuming Alya Semko didn't try to hide it. She did not know anything about the secret project he was doing for Maslak but might reason there could be something incriminating in his possession. As the elevator opened and the two stepped in, Jansky hoped he didn't look nervous. His co-workers were the only ones who knew of his "arrest" and he wanted to keep it that way. Pavlov was a friend of Maslak's; that was what he'd say if anyone recognized them in the lobby. He wondered what officer Pavlov thought of him, the baby-faced office worker in the financial section of Yamel. Probably he suspected Jansky was an adulterer, the nephew of someone powerful who would get a stern warning. That or financial crime. Jansky resisted the urge to deny this. It didn't matter what this man thought, he told himself.

They got out in the first-floor lobby. Unexpectedly, Pavlov walked toward the first-floor office of the pillar itself, where the highest-ranking officials had their offices. The "main office" was separated from the lobby by a supposedly bulletproof glass wall and two large glass doors. Pavlov used a fingerprint scanner to open the doors and led Jansky in. This was strange, Jansky thought. High-ranking ghetto policemen had decorations on their uniforms, bright little brass things that had some name Jansky did not know. Pavlov's uniform was undecorated yet he could open the door without assistance. What was going on?

The two walked into the office, which, reflecting the populist style of the pillar, did not look different than any other. There was a printer and photocopier, file cabinets, desks covered with papers and post-it notes, and two men and two women sitting in cubicles in ordinary business wear. None reacted to Jansky. He had been there before, on a field trip as a child. He thought Maslak might invite him to see it again, but in very different circumstances than this. They continued down the vaguely familiar hall and reached the President's office.

Pavlov smiled. "I'll need to take your phone," he said.

Jansky gave it to him.

"Can you empty your pockets," he said in a semi-apologetic tone.

Jansky took out his credit card, Dador key, and personal house keys and placed them in the tray. "Am I to meet the President? Your 'superior officer'?" He didn't know what answer to expect.

"Yes," Pavlov said, still in a semi-apologetic tone. Jansky imagined that he was about to say: 'I'm just doing my job, son,' but if so, he stopped himself.

"Arms up," Pavlov said.

Jansky felt a fresh terror at the order but complied immediately and was frisked. He reminded himself that there was no jail in Yamel and that if they wanted to arrest him and hold him, they would have done so in an environment where he couldn't make too big of a scene. It was intimidation, he told himself.

Pavlov looked to the door of the President's office. "He's waiting."

Jansky did nothing for a few seconds before turning and entering. The office hadn't changed much since the field trip. He recognized the oversized pillar seal on the wall, containing a bear and a fish. There were portraits of the Pillar's previous Presidents, Vladimir Usachyov and the four men of the Linov dynasty. The desk was ancient and oversized, as was the chair, or perhaps throne, upon which sat Anton Linov. Apart from the small keyboard and small and thin computer monitor that Linov was staring into, everything in the room could have been fifty years old. Jansky sat down at a chair in front of Linov's desk, much smaller than Linov's own but equally antique.

Anton Linov was sixty years old but looked a decade younger. He had short, light brown hair, blue eyes, and a handsome face that was rumored to be the product of plastic surgery. He wore the same dark blue business suit and black tie as in the photos that lined the Yamel Tower. He had inherited his position but not entirely without merit: his father picked him over two older brothers. Linov did not look at Jansky, instead staring into the screen and continuing to type.

"Can you describe the nature of the Glanzia Forum? Sociologically, I mean?" Linov asked, still staring into the screen.

Was *this* all Linov wanted? No, Jansky thought. He's trying to lull you into a false sense of security. Then it will be all the more shocking when he starts trying to intimidate you. Linov was no Albert Einstein, but he surely knew that sending a policeman unannounced with the threat of arrest was not the way to begin a friendly sociological conversation.

"It's a lot like the old churches," Jansky said. "We meet on Sundays. Employ a small group of professional thinkers. The Forum provides us with a sense of community. We can use it to network and make friends. It's mostly run by men, but the women and children can get involved. Richer members donate money to support the club."

Linov continued to stare into his screen. "Okay," Linov said, as if the answer was not worth his time to consider. "What are you up to?"

Jansky said nothing for some seconds. "Mr. President, I do not understand the question."

"Yes, you do," Linov said.

"Am I being interrogated?" Jansky asked. He tried to project confidence, but the sound of his voice gave the fear away.

"Yes," Linov said. He spoke flatly, as if he were conducting a routine dental checkup.

"If that's the case, Mr. President, I must apologize. I've been advised that I should not answer questions without a lawyer present."

"What is this, America? You have no right to a lawyer."

"Then hand me over to the Gestapo and get it over with."

Linov was still staring into the screen and speaking flatly. "Mr. Jansky, do you really believe all that crap about preserving the ghetto's history? Creating that 'time capsule' beneath the ground? You really think anyone's gonna read

that crap?”

Jansky remained silent.

“Or is it all about getting yourself a nice job, nice apartment for the wife, private school for the kids? If that means telling Maslak and Vinov you ‘believe’ in their ‘vision,’ that’s what you’ll do. Family first, right?”

He continued to say nothing.

“These aren’t rhetorical questions,” Linov said, finally turning toward him. “I’m honestly curious. Because you nerds, if you don’t mind me calling you that, you nerds at the Glanzia Forum seem to be risking a lot, putting your lives and the lives of your family members at risk, and for what? Vinov has a job as a librarian. He could probably get a better job in the private sector. At least you’ve made some dough off of this.”

Jansky considered a defiant posture, responding with “life’s really full of mysteries” in a faux-intellectual voice. But he didn’t want to anger the man unnecessarily. And he wasn’t sure if he’d have the guts to say it credibly or if the fear would show in his voice. Silent but strong was the easiest approach. “I do not now and have never wanted to get involved in any kind of conflict within the pillar council,” Jansky said, wishing he hadn’t mangled the words.

Linov smiled. “Well, you are, genius.”

“I don’t know what to say, Mr. President.”

“You want to know how this started, Jansky?”

“Yes,” he said, in an intentionally plain tone of voice.

“The Kyiv Business Association gave me an....” Linov paused as he searched for the word. “An ultimatum. I had to put Yuri Maslak in charge of zoning in the ghetto, or else they’d complain to the Kripo and have me deposed. And probably the Kripo would do a raid. Kill people, Jansky. I couldn’t have the lives on my hands, so I did it. I gave the man the job. And he goes and builds that bunker and then says that if I turn him in, he’ll say it was my idea all along. You think he’s some wise philosopher who cares about ‘history?’ He built that bunker for one reason: to use to threaten me.”

It was at this point that Linov’s tough-guy act fell apart. Previously, when staring into his computer, he did it well. But then, staring into Jansky’s eyes, Jansky could see that the President was afraid of *him*. And he was probably reading canned lines from his computer. Though Jansky had to admit that *he* was also afraid of the President. “Why’d the KBA want Maslak in charge of zoning?”

“There were delays in getting new crap built. Still are. The problem is out there,” Linov said. Jansky assumed he was referring to the Kripo. “But he made them think I was the problem.”

Jansky sighed. Despite the man’s pathetic, pained and fearful look, the story was plausible. “What do you want me to do?”

“I want you to see the reality of this all.”

“Okay, I’ll be won over to your point of view, and then what?”

“You’ll know, when the time comes, what you need to do.”

Both men were silent for about a minute. Jansky decided he would offer to cooperate and then ‘confess’ this to Maslak. His overwhelming desire was to get out of that room with the ability to restrict knowledge of his “arrest” to the four people upstairs.

“Look,” Jansky said. “I’m just a nerd, like you said. And I want money, okay, I admit that. I don’t want to be part of any political struggle.” He thought about “confessing” that he was naïve and did not see that Maslak’s offer was “too good to be true.” But he was afraid that would project either weakness or deceitfulness. Nobody changes their mind that quickly.

“Too bad,” Linov responded harshly.

Jansky sighed. “All I want is for us to enjoy stability in this ghetto. What we have here is the best the Nazis will ever give us. If Maslak is going to endanger that, I will take action.”

“You’ll kill him?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“It might be necessary, Jansky.”

Jansky smiled. “Look, I’ve met many people who are part of the Kyiv Business Association. I can provide influence there if that’s what you need.”

“Don’t think this is a negotiation.”

“Okay, it’s not a negotiation. Give me an ultimatum.”

Linov looked surprised but regained his composure. “Okay, an ultimatum. Two conditions. One: anything Maslak tells you is reported to me. You’ll hand weekly reports to Mr. Pavlov. Two: you do not under any circumstances move away from the ghetto. I need you here.”

“And what is the punishment for leaving?”

“Don’t make me say it,” Linov said, leaving little doubt in Jansky’s mind he referred to retaliation against his family.

“Fine, I agree,” Jansky said. He tried to seem nonchalant

“Just like that, you sell out Maslak?”

“I’m not selling anyone out. I never agreed to be part of any conspiracy. If such a conspiracy does exist, I cannot be said to betray it. If it doesn’t, there will be no information to supply unless you really want to know how he decorates his house.”

“Don’t do the high and mighty act. You agreed to go into that bunker. When you did that, you signed your own death warrant. It’s up to me to decide whether to carry out the execution. Do you understand me?”

Linov was staring back and forth at the screen, and Jansky was almost certain he was reading canned lines. “I do understand, Mr. President. Supposing I do learn some information, how do I report it?”

“First report will be given to Mr. Pavlov on Jun 25 at 3:45 in Stairwell C of the Yamel Tower. Write it on paper and hand it to him.”

“Can I write that down,” he said, having nothing to write with.

“Pavlov will give you the time and place written down.”

For about a minute, the two simply stared at one another. Jansky wanted

to ask if he could go but felt in his gut that he shouldn't. He could construe this as defiance, but really it was simple fear.

Finally, Linov broke the silence. "If you want to contact me with critical information that can't wait for the weekly reports, write an email to the email address that Pavlov will provide. It's not secure and I won't even read any email sent to it; all sending something to that address does is tell me you want to get in contact with me. I will handle it by getting in contact with you. Do not attempt to come back here. Understand?"

"Yes."

"Alright. Don't think you've fooled me into thinking I have your loyalty. I'm counting on *fear* to motivate you to do the right thing. I can't just have Maslak shot on the street without the Kripo asking questions. The same's not true for you, Jansky. Don't ever stop looking over your shoulder, Janksy. We'll be watching you." He spoke in a bombastic tone, but the fear and nervousness in his eyes was clear.

"I understand."

"Don't make me threaten anyone else."

"Point received," he said, in a feigned voice of niceness. "Anything else?"

"No, go away."

After waiting a few seconds to see if Linov meant it, Jansky turned around and walked back into the hallway. Pavlov was sitting in a foldable chair that faced the office and was drinking a cup of tea. He smiled at Jansky and picked up the tray he had placed his phone, cards, and keys in earlier. Jansky, worried he still looked fearful, smiled back and took his things. With it was a piece of folded paper that wasn't there before. He thought about saying that he and the President had an enlightening conversation but did not do so, instead walking toward the exit. Pavlov walked slowly behind him to assure he'd exit the 'secure' area. Jansky forced himself to smile as he walked out the doors.

He stood in the lobby for a few seconds, to see if he recognized anyone. He didn't, but that didn't mean nobody recognized him. If anyone did and asked him what he was doing, he decided he'd say he met with a "high pillar official" but was asked not to share anything else. People expected pointless secrecy from the pillar and would not think much of it. He walked to the elevator. He wasn't sure how he should feel. He was in danger, yes. But he had faced down the President of the Pillar Council. Since childhood, he had always known the ghetto aristocracy as a bunch of mediocrities. But perhaps he subconsciously doubted it, always suspected the Linovs were the competent men in business suits they claimed to be, mediocre in book smarts but excelling in street smarts. The man he just met had neither. Should he be afraid of Linov's threat? No, he told himself. Linov had threatened him, but it would have been far more credible had Artur Savel, the Chief of the Ghetto Police, been there in the room. It was likely Savel was unaware of whatever nonsense was going on with Linov and Maslak and would refuse to carry out

any orders to harm Jansky or his family.

Should he be angry at Maslak? ‘Yes’ was his immediate thought. Maslak had continually expressed his distaste for Linov but never hinted there was a murderous feud between them. He led Jansky to believe Linov either approved of or did not know about the bunker. If Maslak had told Jansky everything, would he have become part of the project? Maybe and maybe not. In any case, his immediate priority should be to make sure that his office had not been searched and that knowledge of the incident would not travel. The elevator arrived, and Jansky boarded. It arrived at the forty-third floor, and Jansky walked to the office and keyed in.

The other workers quickly came out and met him. Jansky looked plainly and passively toward Alya Semko, who had a worried look on her face. Egorov, Orlov, and Maxim Semko all looked similarly concerned.

“What happened?” asked Maxim Semko.

Before Jansky could answer, Alya Semko spoke. “I told everyone,” she said, “that there will not be a word about this to anyone. No friends, no siblings, no spouses, no girlfriends, nobody can know that this has happened.” She spoke firmly and looked at all three of Jansky’s colleagues as she said it. Jansky suspected the tone was mainly directed at her less-than-fully-reliable son.

“Thank you,” Jansky said. He still looked to Alya Semko, wondering if and to what extent he should answer Maxim’s question.

Aya Semko looked back at him. “Are you alright?”

“I’m okay,” Jansky said plainly.

Alya Semko looked at the other employees. “Toma and I will be taking a walk, getting some fresh air,” she said.

Jansky was surprised. “I’ll get my things,” he said, testing her reaction. She did not object and he went to his office, breathing a sigh of relief. He put his work computer in his bag and looked over his shoulder. None of the others were looking through the glass walls of his office, so he did something he had earlier resolved never to go. He got out his project computer and put the identical laptops side-by-side in his backpack. He put the backpack on, walked back into the main room, and followed Semko out into the hall.

“I alerted Maslak as soon as you left,” whispered Semko as they walked toward the elevator. “He canceled his business and went home. We’ll meet him there.”

“Thank you,” he said. And he meant it, though he also knew it was an ultimately self-interested move. Semko did not know what he was doing for Maslak, but she likely guessed it related in some way to Jansky’s “arrest.” And she realized Maslak would want to meet him as soon as possible to give him minimal time to think through the situation. But he didn’t need it. He would promise Maslak he’d be his ‘double agent.’ What he’d actually do was something he’d decide later. Additionally, he’d make a show of being upset with Maslak but would ultimately accept his promise of “protection.”

"What friends are for, right," Semko said, slightly nervously. The elevator arrived and they boarded. It descended and opened, and the two walked through the lobby, exited the building, and then walked toward Maslak's penthouse. They did so in complete silence. Though she had seemed nervous at Yamel, by the time she was outside, she appeared unphased. She even smiled at an old Russian song two young girls were singing. They went into Maslak's building and told the guard, a young, blond, muscular man, different from the guy Jansky knew from Sunday nights, that they were there to see Yuri Maslak. The guard looked on his computer, presumably for Semko's photograph, and then let them through. They took the elevator to the twenty-fifth floor.

Semko ringed the doorbell and Maslak himself answered it. "Come in," Maslak said in a familiar, unserious voice. He wouldn't want to let his wife, children, or servants in on the fact that something unusual had happened. They walked through the frontmost portion of Maslak's apartment and continued into the core of the apartment. They approached a solid black door that Jansky remembered led to Maslak's "basement bar." While every other door was white, this one was black and was secured by a fingerprint lock hanging on the door itself, so it stood out. The ominousness was likely intentional. Maslak placed his finger in the scanner and opened the door. He descended the stairwell, followed by Semko and Jansky. At the bottom was a plain wooden door they opened and went through.

Jansky had been in Maslak's "basement bar" once before. It consisted of a large windowless room dimly illuminated by red-tinted lighting. There were dartboards, a pool table, and a fine wooden table counter surrounded by several cabinets that reached the ceiling. Photographs on the walls showed Maslak with notables; none showed his family. Jansky's eyes darted to one in particular, showing Maslak, Linov, and a man of similar age he did not recognize, smiling and embracing one another.

Jansky and Semko sat at two of the large blue chairs that surrounded a small table. Maslak went over to the refrigerator. "Do you want a beer?" he asked.

"Yes," Semko said.

Jansky's instinct was to say no, but he did want a beer and thought saying so would send a positive signal that he was not all that angry with Yuri Maslak. "Yes," he said.

Maslak came over with two beers for them and went back to the refrigerator to get something for himself. The gray can was bare, with black letters that read *State Department of Alcohol Rationing – Beer*, with a message in German that "regular, excessive consumption of alcohol causes damage to almost every organ of the human body and leads to the collective deterioration of the Volk. Alcohol abusers who refuse treatment may be subject to sterilization in accordance with the eugenic policies of their pillar."

Maslak returned with a glass of wine and sat down with the three of them.

Jansky and Maslak began taking off their business suits, then began to drink in a brief, awkward silence.

It was Semko who decided to speak up. “Have you shown Toma this room before?”

“Yes, once,” Maslak said. “Like most people seemed impressed by it. My children want very much to invite their friends down here, and I must be careful about locking it up.” He paused briefly, considering his words. “I bring people here if I get the feeling this is their preferred environment. If they’re more button-down, I show them my office.”

“How button-down am I?” Jansky asked, continuing the small talk.

“More button-down than many. Though your persona is a bit different. You’re very otherworldly, as I’m sure you’ve been told. A good thing, particularly in the context of the Glanzia Forum.”

“Yes, I have been told that. Sometimes I wish I could be less so.” Jansky didn’t mean it in any real sense. But he often tried to signal a positive attitude toward the “normies.”

“I think otherworldliness can be good, too,” Semko said. “Let’s you step back, analyze the world from a more objective perspective.” Jansky thought she was trying to seem calm. But it sounded forced.

“Indeed,” Maslak said. “But let’s not beat around the bush. You were brought to talk with someone?”

“Yes.”

“Who was it?”

“Anton Linov.”

Maslak didn’t look surprised. “And what did he say?”

“Said you are trying to depose him. Threatened my family if I didn’t help him stop you.”

“Oh God,” Maslak said.

“What’s your side of the story?”

Maslak looked taken aback. Perhaps he expected to tell his side in a question-and-answer format that would see Jansky revealing what he knew and allow Maslak to “tune” his answers. For a few seconds Maslak was silent and looked like he was thinking deeply about how he would answer.

“I went to the Kyiv Business Association looking for clients for my company,” Maslak said. “I heard a lot of complaints about the cost of housing in the ghetto. The Americans would tell me how they tried to recruit Russians from other ghettos but kept getting told, ‘sorry, the housing costs in North Kyiv are too great.’ They also heard about construction delays within the ghetto. They asked me if I could get Anton Linov to meet with them. I duly contacted the man. And you know what Linov told me in response? F*** that; it’s beneath me. I relayed his response to the Americans, profanity removed. They asked me if Linov was a good leader. What would you have said, Toma?”

Before Jansky had a chance to answer, Maslak continued. “Eventually,

the frustration boiled over and Randall Falk, the President of the KBA at the time, basically said you gotta do this, or we'll complain to the Kripo. Zenev resigned as Zoning Director and I was appointed. Linov seethed a bit, but when my father retired, he appointed me as his replacement on the council with no hesitation. In the summer of 2093, I learned about Taras Linov's history of violence. Right now, the only victims are his friends. You know the clique, tough guys and women who like tough guys. But I don't want him in government. I brought my concerns to the other members of the council. I wanted us to make clear to Anton Linov that his son was unfit to lead and would not be elected. They refused. But they also told Linov they would not tolerate him removing me from my position in the Zoning Department."

"This was when Linov told the council the theory I'm sure he told you, that I got the KBA to "blackmail" him into appointing me as Zoning Director. He hadn't told anyone before and I'm sure even his loyalists didn't take it seriously. When the council refused to act, he started threatening my family. Telling me he'd frame me for a crime and hand me over to the Kripo. And perhaps you think this was the wrong reaction, and I have some pangs of doubt about it myself, but I took him down to the bunker and said that if turned over to the Kripo, I might be tortured and I might not have the fortitude to hold out and might reveal the existence of the bunker, might tell them the man who put me in that torture chamber instructed me to build it." Maslak spoke in an honestly apologetic tone as if he did not expect Jansky to believe him and indeed felt that he did not deserve for Jansky to believe him.

Jansky looked at Semko, then at Maslak. "So she knows about the bunker?"

"And your project, yes. I didn't tell you, 'need to know' and all that," Maslak said in the same tired, apologetic tone.

"Okay," Jansky said in a plain tone of voice. "Now I see a number of potential problems with the story."

"Fire away," Maslak said.

"You remember a Forum meeting we had about six months ago concerning a certain genre of science fiction?"

Maslak looked confused. Science fiction was a common topic of the meetings. There were many Jansky could be referring to.

"About characters for whom political power just falls into their lap?"

Maslak had a look of recognition. Readers of science fiction novels often have a dim view of politics and politicians. They want their hero to be the type of personality who wants to be a scientist or engineer, something "productive." So the protagonist "falls into" political power. Patrice Blanchet in *Children of Jupiter* is the paradigmatic example discussed at the meeting, a scientist who needed to be prodded and cajoled by the King to become the Prime Minister. In the unlikely event that a King thought scientists would make good political leaders, he'd have already been surrounded by hundreds of eager power-seekers who were or claimed to be scientists and would act to

assure that Blanchet remained in his ivory tower.

"It's not like I rose up from nothing the way Blanchet did," Maslak said. "I am the son of a council member, after all. And I always wanted the job as Zoning Director. I didn't foresee exactly how it would work. I thought I'd do it the 'right' way. Be successful in the construction industry. Invite the right people to my parties. Donate to the right charities." Maslak spoke sincerely, without the know-it-all tone. Jansky had never quite seen him like he was then and there. He was either truthful or a good actor.

"So the council won't refuse to elect Taras Linov yet also won't permit you to be removed as Zoning Director?" Jansky asked skeptically.

"It makes a certain amount of sense in the context of the political economy of the council system," Maslak said. "When a councilman dies or resigns, the President appoints his designated successor, usually a son, less often a daughter, son-in-law, or unrelated friend or subordinate. In return, when a President dies or resigns, the council members elect the President's designated successor. The President makes policy, but the council members have the freedom to speak their minds so long as they do it *privately*. If I were to shout from the rooftops, 'Taras Linov is unfit to lead,' that would be me breaking the implicit contract. I have not done that. I haven't even shared the information with the bulk of our small circle of friends. But if Linov removed me from the Zoning for expressing private concern over Taras Linov, that would be *him* breaking the implicit contract. They might vote to depose him, or at least be less inclined to elect Taras as his successor."

Jansky continued to look at Maslak skeptically.

"You could call them the swing votes," Maslak said. "The people who refuse to either say they will or will not elect Taras Linov. If you asked them, they'd say they're being careful, deliberate, waiting for the right kind of information. 'We can't act rashly, be impulsive, no, that would be bad.' It's been two years and they are still carefully weighing their options. 'That can be made for kicking, and kicking is what we'll do....' I'm sure you know the type."

And he did. His cousin was one example, refusing to consider marrying her boyfriend until she finished her medical training program. Jansky had asked her a series of questions. If she completed the program, would she want to get married? If she failed to complete the program, would she want to get married? Was the question "should I marry" really dependent on the question "will I succeed in acquiring the medical certificate?" Or was it an excuse to delay the mental anguish of the decision? She gave a non-response and Jansky's mother, her aunt, scowled at him, after which he simply smiled and said he was sure it would all work out in the end. It didn't, as the boyfriend got sick of her "leading him on" and ended the relationship. But the councilmen would not be thrown out of their jobs for indecision disguised as prudence. Then again, it was possible the "swing voters" had a better reason for delaying their action and that Maslak was appealing to Jansky's propensity

to believe the elites were a bunch of mediocrities less clever than himself.

“Taras Linov’s acts of violence, were you there when they occurred?”

“No.”

“So how do you know they actually happened?”

“Have you ever punched someone, Toma? Not counting middle-school scuffles?”

“I have not.”

“There,” Maslak said with a vindicated look. “You denied it unambiguously. That’s what innocent people do. A guilty person who’s smart will do the same. Do you know what Taras Linov told me when I asked him? Said it wasn’t my business, basically. The words he used were ruder, but you get the picture.”

“What did Anton Linov say?”

“Something along the line of ‘shut up.’”

“When I was brought on,” Jansky said, “you could have told me about this stuff.”

“If you’re dissatisfied with it now, we can arrange a severance package and you can leave,” Maslak said.

“Linov has threatened my family.”

“We won’t let him do anything.”

Jansky thought in silence for a couple of minutes, taking drinks of beer. If this caused emotional distress for the two people in front of him, all the better. But there was no internal conflict about what to do. If Linov was bluffing, there was no reason to run. If Linov was not bluffing, he’d take his vengeance out on Jansky’s family still in the ghetto. Jansky had to stay.

“Okay, Taras Linov is unfit to lead. How about some other Linov? The daughter? A Nephew?”

Maslak got a phone out of his pocket and fiddled with it for some time. He then handed it to Jansky. It was a new model, larger but not heavier than his own. It was set to play a video. He could see a woman standing in front of a marble wall with a black carpet on the floor. She had long blond hair, pale skin, and about average looks. She wore a dress that was white, revealing, and ill-fitting. She looked agitated. Jansky pressed play and was impressed by the video quality.

“Let me in,” the woman yelled.

“I told you,” came the voice of an unseen male. “We can’t let you in unless you renew your membership. All we need is 170 Weltmarks.”

“You will stand aside, *now*,” the woman said. “My father is the President. I am his daughter. I don’t get pushed around. I push people around.”

“I’m sorry, ma’am, but we have been told that we can’t make an exception for you. All we need is 170 Weltmarks, same as anyone else needs to pay.”

“I’m ordering you otherwise.”

“I am sorry, ma’am, but I have been instructed not to make an exception

for anyone.”

“You’ll make an exception for me.”

Jansky resisted the urge to pause the video, which continued on for twelve repetitive minutes of the man saying he couldn’t make an exception and the woman demanding he make an exception. Occasionally she switched from Russian to German as if she was a Kripo official. As Jansky expected, the location turned out to be A.G. Club. Finally, the woman left, telling the man he was ‘dead.’ Jansky turned to Maslak. “That’s Emma Linov?”

“Yes,” Maslak said. “She can be a charming girl, apparently. Has three different children by three different men. Might be a charmer, but not fit for a government of laws,” he said. “Of course, there is an alternative explanation for the video. Us conspirators found a woman who looked just like her and paid her to act it out,” Maslak said.

Jansky wasn’t sure whether to smile or scowl and tried to look emotionless. The emotional part of his brain thought it was funny and the rational part thought it was not a time for laughter.

“And the nephews?”

“A moot point since Anton Linov doesn’t like his siblings.”

“So you must convince the council to elect someone outside the Linov family?”

“Yes.”

“Like yourself?”

“Yes,” Maslak said. He spoke as if it was the most obvious question of the world. Jansky felt a chill down his spine. He imagined Maslak speaking to Semko, Vinov, and Sorokin; hell, maybe there were more. Making rational arguments 95% of the time, until he came to this question, where all three knew that their dedication to their Fuhrer required the suspension of rationality.

“Suppose Linov reaches the age of mandatory retirement and the council members insist on electing Taras Linov. Will you go to the KBA and tell them to try to depose him like Maslak said you did in 2075?”

“It won’t be necessary,” Maslak said.

“What if it is?” Jansky asked.

Maslak smiled. “Look, I know you’re under a lot of stress right now. You wish I had told you about this stuff from the beginning, but you must understand why I couldn’t. Linov has been making empty threats to me for two years now. I decided I would keep those threats to myself because while they are empty, the perception of them, getting out there,” he said, pointing down toward the city and implicitly toward the Kripo. “Could be very bad.”

“You didn’t answer my question.”

“I’m sorry, son, that isn’t how I operate. You don’t impose conditions on me. If you don’t like what’s on offer, I can talk with Semko. You’ll fight for a generous severance package from Dador,” he said, looking to her.

“I’ll take a pay cut myself to make it happen,” Semko said, not sounding

very sincere.

“So you thought what would happen is that you pull off this non-coup coup against Linov. Make yourself President. Serve until age sixty-five. And then you’d be succeeded by Sorokin, Vinov, myself, your children....”

“Whoever the Pillar Council chooses to elect, remember, it needn’t listen to me either. And as for you, I’m sure you’d make a great councilman, great President, but I never make promises I can’t keep. What I wanted from you was a person who could analyze the diaries. I know what Linov told you, that I built that bunker to use to threaten him. I’m sure he believes it, too, because he’s the kind of person who doesn’t understand belief in anything greater than the self. Every day on June 22, we silently remember the millions of our people lost in the war. Who were shot in mass executions, starved to death in the cities, who froze to death in the villages after the Nazis seized all the winter clothing. And then burned to death by nuclear bombs a generation later. We can’t do much to commemorate it, lest the Kripo come in. But even the small things we do, he can’t see the point. Says it’s all just sentimentality.”

Maslak’s apologetic tone had slowly shifted to a firmness that was more “in character.” Jansky saw that this was his chance to signal to Maslak that he “forgave” him. The time capsule was the cause greater than himself, an excuse to do what he wanted to do anyway, stay at his cushy job with Dador. But he still had to express a few more words of skepticism, lest his “forgiveness” seems feigned.

“Doesn’t it sound a bit convenient? I mean, Linov comes and threatens you, and you just happen to have this weapon lying underground that you can use to threaten him, but you didn’t build it for that purpose, no.”

“How long have you known about that bunker?” Maslak asked in a firm tone of voice.

“About a year.”

“Did it ever occur to you that it was built to blackmail people?”

It *had*, in fact, occurred to him that Maslak had built it for the reasons of “mutually assured destruction.” To bind him to Sorokin, Vinov, and then Jansky, assure they couldn’t betray one another and that Linov couldn’t turn him over to the Kripo. He dismissed the possibility owing to Occam’s razor. But he did consider it. But saying so wouldn’t signal well. “No,” Jansky said.

“Didn’t even occur to you,” Maslak said, looking vindicated. “Now, what changed today? Linov told you something he has every incentive to tell you.”

“And you just confessed to using it for the purpose he accused you of creating it for.”

Maslak looked confused and dejected. “My family had been threatened. You know how that feels.”

“Yes,” Jansky said. He sensed that this was his chance to “forgive” Maslak, to unite with him against their common enemy. “You believe in it? In our time capsule? In history?”

“Yes,” Maslak said.

“But who will be there to read the stuff we put in the capsule?”

“You tell me. You knew the odds we faced yesterday, yet you continued to write your book. Why?”

In the back of his mind, he had wondered if he was writing just for the heck of it, because he enjoyed it and was being paid to do it. He looked down, a signal of deference. He wanted Maslak to believe he was being ‘won over’ by the latter’s arguments. “I always thought there would be a chain of people. And that in many centuries the Nazis will fall, and we will bring it all out. But now that Linov knows....”

“The secret will die with him,” Maslak said firmly.

“You think so?”

“Yes. He won’t tell his son.”

Jansky slumped and took a few sips of beer.

“Do you think that Muhamed was a Christian?” Maslak asked.

“I don’t know,” Jansky said. “I’ve never been that interested in religious history,” he said. He knew the Nazi version of the story, that Muhammed and the early Arab conquerors were Christians whose conquests were motivated by politics and ethnic particularism, and that Islam was a creation of his successors, motivated by a desire to preserve the Arabs’ ethnic uniqueness.

“No way to know for sure,” Maslak said. “We can’t look at the physical documents. Perhaps *they* can, in Berlin. Or perhaps they have already been incinerated and only exist in electronic form. Not everything the Nazis say is a lie. I’m pretty sure the Roman Empire did exist. But without something like the time capsule, there would be no way to distinguish truth from lies.”

Jansky nodded his agreement.

“I’m not the kind of idiot who expects a civil war next Friday,” Maslak said. “But we are only one hundred and sixty years into the thousand-year Reich. Many states have lasted longer, then fell apart.”

“We can hope,” Jansky said.

For half a minute, the three sat in silence, drinking beer and wine. “Is there any way I could meet Taras Linov? See what kind of man he is?”

“He’s a member of A.G. Club. But I don’t think you’d be accepted as a member; I’m sorry to say.”

Jansky took a long sip of beer. “No strings you could pull?”

“No,” he said. “You can’t get in unless you’re old money or are there to scrub toilets. But maybe you could find a way to get to him otherwise,” Maslak said.

“Maybe,” Jansky said, in an unserious tone intended to signal that he didn’t have any idea how to do so. “Linov asked me to write reports, everything you say and do.”

“Go ahead,” Maslak said.

“I say everything that happened here?”

“Yes, yes,” he said, annoyed.

He looked toward Semko. “The fact that she knows about the bunker?”

Maslak sighed. “These are empty threats. It doesn’t matter what you write.”

Jansky looked at Semko, who shrugged. But her facial expression indicated fear.

“Alright,” Jansky said, unsure of what he would do.

“What are the voting strengths of the various blocs? How many people would refuse to vote for Taras? How many are ‘Linov loyalists?’ Swing voters”

For the first time yet, Maslak looked annoyed by the question. “This is all highly secret,” Maslak said. “Remember the culture. We on the council are a united front. Our discussions, disagreements, criticisms of one another, cannot get out. I’m not going to share more information than necessary with someone who could walk away tomorrow. I will tell you at some future time; that’s all I’ll say.”

Jansky understood Maslak’s perspective. And he thought about the prior probabilities, attempting a kind of ‘dirty Bayesian analysis.’ The prior probability for someone like Maslak embarking on such a complex blackmail scheme was relatively low, below .01. This was such even accounting for his Machiavellian persona. For most people, it’s only a persona. The prior probability for Linov having incompetent children was much higher, around .2. The probability that Maslak would make a big deal about this as an excuse to raise himself to the Presidency was close to 1, and the probability Linov would respond by lobbing an accusation at Maslak was around .2. And if Linov did accuse Maslak of something, the natural response would be ‘well why did you appoint him Zoning Director?’ It was natural for the appointment to be the basis of the accusation. If Jansky could confirm the claims about Linov’s son, and he thought he could simply ask the elder Linov to meet the man, the probability that the accusation that Maslak “blackmailed” Linov was false should be far higher than its converse.

Regardless, he’d want to make it look like he’d be loyal to Maslak, irrespective of what he’d later do. “I can only say what’s in my heart,” Jansky said, wishing he had thought of a more clever line. “The same thing I told Linov. What we have here is the best the Nazis will ever give us. All I want is to preserve this, to keep the promise of a good life for my children. I want them to grow up worrying about failing their math test, not ending up in a concentration camp.”

“I want the same thing,” Maslak said, sounding very sincere.

“Then you have my loyalty.”

“Conditional loyalty is fine with me,” Maslak said, smiling. “I’ve never asked for unconditional loyalty.”

Jansky glanced at Semko to see if she was taken aback by Maslak’s claim. She wasn’t.

“Then we understand each other,” Jansky said, forcing himself to smile.

“Yes,” Maslak said.

After some silence, Alya Semko stood up, gave the Nazi salute, and said in a voice just short of shouting: “Lincoln was a Nazi!”

Jansky smiled. The phrase had a tortuous history. Supposedly the Black Americans used to claim the ancient Mediterranean peoples, Egyptians, Greeks, and even Jews, were actually Black. The White Americans had mocked this belief with the phrase ‘Socrates was a n***er.’ The Blacks supposedly responded by mocking the Americans’ own historical revisionism, the unsuccessful attempts to have the Nazis “rehabilitate” historical figures like Abraham Lincoln. The taunt then spread to Russians. When a Russian worker felt mistreated at work, there was always a temptation to scrawl on the bathroom stall that “Lincoln was a Nazi.” In the ghetto, where there were no Americans to take offense, the phrase had yet another meaning, used as a non-sequitur in response to ridiculous claims or situations. If you were at a store and were told they were out of a product even though you could look behind the counter and see that product, you raised your right arm and said: “Lincoln was a Nazi.” Jansky couldn’t help but find it funny. After chuckling, he stood up, looked toward Semko, and raised his right arm.

“Lincoln was a Nazi!”

Chapter 6

Toma Jansky wore shorts and a plain blue shirt as he walked from Bendzardy to the neighborhood of Shymkove in the north. It was a Sunday mourning, and he had no idea if Ivan Vinov would be home. It had been three days since Linov threatened him, and he had had time to dwell on what had happened. He looked left and right at the twenty-story plattenbau. They were the same as any others on the outside, white concrete cubes with windows. He couldn’t tell who lived within, but given the neighborhood demographics, they probably housed members of the working class. He thought about the life of the Russian worker, by nature a very regimented one. With four families in a single apartment, you sleep and awaken at the same time as everyone. You shower when your time comes. With one television per apartment, you must watch the same TV shows as everyone else. You eat with others at the ground floor cafeteria, which serves the same bone-cheap dishes every mourning, soup with flavoring and noodles, potatoes, rice, or beans. You work six twelve-hour days, with an hour to get to and from your workplace, twenty minutes at lunch to chow down bread and margarine, coming home with little time or energy to do anything but sleep. You look forward to Sunday, where you can splurge on some candy, canned meat, or beer. You know there are theatres, social clubs, and athletic facilities, but you mostly spend the day in your or neighboring apartment buildings with others in your working-class milieu.

The Nazis set out to take as much from the head tax to reduce you to bare

subsistence. Taxes and donations from rich Russians bump you over this level, but not much. The pillar subsidizes your gas, electricity, and medical treatment, freeing a bit of money to spend at the pillar-run dime store. There you can buy items donated by richer Russians, old clothing, black-and-white television sets, and rocking chairs that no longer rock. You look forward to the first Sunday of December, the start of the Winter Aid giveaway. You stand patiently in line at the schools and pillar offices of the ghetto, waiting to receive your box of goodies: bread, cake, dried milk, cheese, canned meat, cooking oil, vitamins, candy, substitute tea and coffee. Slightly more valuable are the Weltmarks automatically deposited in your bank account at the end of the day, the amount depending on how much money the pillar has at the end of the year and how much the people donated.

You might envy your children, freed from work outside the home until age fourteen. You might hope they can climb into the middle class if they show the right skills at managing people and pushing paper. If you are one of the children who goes on to do so, you'd live a very different kind of life. Higher pay means you can pay the head tax on fewer hours, fifty-five per week rather than seventy-two. You can afford to drink imitation coffee and eat meat on a daily basis. You can buy a membership at an athletic club. Your apartment is small but is yours alone, privacy being more than a theoretical proposition. You may feel fortunate compared to the workers, but you know that many above you, Russian and non-Russian, have it much better. Jansky knew because he had grown up in this class and thought the upper rungs of it would be his fate.

He remembered an incident that occurred when he was a nineteen-year-old code monkey at Nemul. His boss was a short, fat, and ugly American man, almost resembling the Nazi caricatures of Jews. He was berating one of Jansky's young Russian co-workers, yelling that the man had done half a day's work and would get a quarter of the day's pay. He yelled that he'd give a day off to a man whose child died; that was it. He spoke contemptuously of the *Ruskies*, perhaps angered by his inability to get a job in the first-tier world. But the Russian managers were little better. Everywhere there was strictness; everywhere there was a lack of trust and privacy.

In the past three days, Jansky had experienced a very different world, both materially and mentally. He dined that morning on an omelet made of eggs, cheese, spinach, and bacon. These were luxury products, partly because of the production cost but mostly because the Nazis declared them luxuries and imposed high taxes. Jansky had time to mull over these questions because Semko and Maslak, without needing to be asked, told him he could take it easy for the next few days. Come into the office all day Friday and half-day Saturday, but only work if you feel like working. It wasn't that they were different, morally, from the men who prod the restaurant cooks, construction workers, or code monkeys to get their work done. It was that they inhabited a different world, where workers had the savings to credibly threaten to quit if

they felt disrespected.

There was a reason Jansky was thinking about the middle-class lifestyle. Linov had threatened his family with death. Would it not have been better if he had just accepted the life of a code monkey in the upper rungs of the middle class? He, Nora, and their daughters would have been four more anonymous faces, unaware of and unconcerned by the feud between Linov and Maslak, not needing to worry about someone discovering the time capsule and reporting it to the Kripo. Part of him wished he could go back and part of him did not. He was securing a good life for his family. There was risk, sure, but it seemed remote. The more he thought about it, the more convinced he was that Linov's threat was empty. He hadn't fired Maslak from his job as Zoning Director. He hadn't taken any action against Vinov or Sorokin, both pillar employees. He hadn't sent the tax department to launch a frivolous investigation of Dador. Why would he act against Jansky, a relatively minor figure?

Jansky had faced a similar question when Maslak asked him to join the time capsule project. He thought for a while about the bunker, and the more he thought about it, the more confident he was that it would remain hidden. It was connected to the outside world by a narrow vent and electrical cable in Maslak's closet that could easily be cut off if necessary. Sure, the Kripo carried out periodic inspections of the ghetto, but even if they saw the fuse box and ventilation connector right in front of their eyes, it would be highly unlikely they would think to drill into the latter and see the wiring enmeshed into the concrete wall or ask where precisely the vent goes.

A small part of him derived a perverse pleasure from the situation. Ever since Jansky was a young child, he felt the world gave him insufficient respect. Now, the two most powerful people in the ghetto were looking to him, hoping he'd do their bidding. He hoped the logical side of his personality, and the side concerned with protecting his family, was dominant. But the megalomaniacal side had its uses. He wanted Maslak to believe it was his true personality. That Toma Jansky was a man raised on science fiction novels, novels of the competent man, who could lead men into battle, survive in the wilderness, understand physics, design and build a home, climb the corporate ladder, write a novel, fight with guns, knives, or bare hands, hack into a computer network and, last but not least, seduce women. There won't be a door in his life he isn't going to try to open, though he possesses the cunning not to do so immediately, to wait and gather data about what, exactly, is behind each one. As this Toma Jansky grew more and more successful, arrogance increasingly dominated his thinking. When Maslak presented him with the door leading down to the bunker, he *had* to open it, had to mark off in his mind's accomplishment chart that he had written a work of history and struck back against the Nazis. Now, presented with the opportunity to help depose the President and rise to a high position himself, he couldn't pass it up. Indeed, this version of Toma Jansky wanted to be President himself, though

he was smart enough to know he'd need Maslak's help to get there. But Jansky couldn't go overboard in his character. Maslak didn't want a man in his conspiracy who could be derailed by sexual immorality, so Jansky had to be his true, monogamous self.

He had told Nora that something had happened, following the standard advice to always base one's lies on the truth. Maslak had told him something, he said, but for obvious reasons he could not repeat it. She had smiled, kissed him, and said she wouldn't pry. Perhaps she thought there was some corruption scandal. Perhaps she thought Maslak was an adulterer. The important thing was that she didn't seem worried. He had told Nora that mourning that Maslak needed his help with something, something that had to be kept "secret." He then rolled his eyes to hint that it was just Maslak being self-important. She didn't seem suspicious. In the unlikely event that she was following him, she'd see him heading to the apartment of Maslak's friend Ivan Vinov, consistent with what he had said.

He walked about twenty-five blocks and was tired by the time he reached the apartment complex. He would ask Vinov to share secrets, things Maslak wouldn't want him to know. He would not do this with Alya Semko or Koloda Sorokin. He was not that close to Semko, and she seemed to him to be a follower by nature. Sorokin seemed like a man who would follow whoever could help him achieve political power, which at the time was Maslak. But Ivan Vinov was different. He was a truly independent thinker, someone who understood the social dynamics of not just the outgroup but his own group. A group of people who were more rational, farsighted, and morally conscious than the majority could use this very fact to justify irrational, shortsighted, selfish behavior. Vinov had told this to Jansky, using the English phrase *self-licensing*. Jansky knocked on the door and hoped Vinov was home.

Ivan Vinov's wife answered the door. Lara Vinov was forty-three years old and had light brown hair, blue eyes, and pale white skin. She was slightly overweight and dressed in a stained white t-shirt. She had a vaguely low-class demeanor, though she worked as an accountant and likely made as much as her husband. She looked at Jansky skeptically. "You here to see Ivan?"

"Yes," he said, smiling.

"Does he expect you?"

"I was in the neighborhood and thought I'd stop by. Like they used to do in the old days, before cell phones."

She said nothing and continued to look skeptically at Jansky.

"If he's busy, that's no problem. I'll see him at the meeting later tonight."

She turned around and said, "Ivan! Toma is here, Toma Jansky."

Ivan Vinov came out and looked at him, a bit confused. He wore jeans and a blue t-shirt emblazoned with some logo. "Something the matter?" asked Vinov.

"Not a big deal, really, but if you have a second to talk, that'd be great."

"I guess I do," he said, smiling. "Come on in."

Vinov led Jansky into the apartment. It was the standard size for middle-class people in the ghetto and was very messy, with papers, books, and videocassettes strew about here and there and the walls and carpets miscolored. Jansky wondered if there were arguments between Ivan and Lara Vinov about the Glanzia Forum. “You socialize with all these rich people; why can’t you get a rich person job,” he imagined Lara asking. Perhaps he could but preferred a job that gave him time for the time capsule. They walked to the backmost bedroom where Vinov and his wife slept. Vinov carefully closed the door. The room was messy and, compared to Jansky’s own bedroom, very small.

“Can they hear us,” Jansky said.

“My kids are in their room, probably playing games. I can tell you with near one hundred percent certainty that they have no interest in eavesdropping on their middle-aged father.”

“And Lara?”

“Maybe she’s pressing her head against the wall. If you’re afraid of that, don’t call her fat.”

“Alright,” he said. It would be tedious, but they could speak in code.

“What about you?” Vinov asked.

“What about me?” said Jansky, confused.

“Got any listening devices?”

“No.”

Vinov looked at him skeptically.

Jansky got his phone, keys, and wallet out of his pocket and set them on the bed. He then took the battery out of the phone, then turned his pockets inside out. Then he put his arms out horizontally. “Go ahead,” he said. “Feel me up.”

Unexpectedly, Vinov began doing so, in a way that made him feel far more creeped out than when the policeman had done it. But Jansky realized it was an understandable reaction. Jansky *was* Linov’s agent, double or not.

“Did you hear about a conversation that occurred between Yuri and me?” Jansky asked, having no doubt about what he expected to hear.

“Yes,” Vinov said.

“How do you think I should respond?”

“Do nothing.”

“That can be interpreted in multiple ways.”

“Okay, do the same things you have been doing over the past year.”

“And what if the situation changes?”

“Look, I’ll let you know if that happens.”

“So you knew the extent of the conflict between Maslak and his wife?” Jansky asked, making quote marks with his hands around “his wife.”

“Yes,” said Vinov plainly.

“I guess it makes sense, personal loyalty and all that, why you didn’t tell anyone else.”

Vinov nodded. He did not look guilty about not warning Jansky of the mess he had stepped into. Perhaps he thought Jansky had implicitly accepted danger when he agreed to work on the time capsule. Regardless, Jansky wanted Vinov as an ally, and would not express anger at him, however he felt on the inside.

“What exactly is it that I’ve signed up for?” asked Jansky, whispering. “Maslak made reference to a ‘severance package’ if I don’t want to do certain things. But he was vague about what those things were.”

“Do what you have been doing,” he whispered. “Write,” he said.

Someone listening would assume it referred to investment reports, not the time capsule. Jansky simply looked at Vinov for a few seconds.

“And,” Vinov added, in a plain tone, “Maslak might want you to meet prominent people and toe a certain line to them about the relative competence of different ‘politicians.’”

“Is the line true?” asked Jansky, no longer whispering.

“Well,” Vinov whispered. “I’ve met the President once. I won’t go into detail except to say he wasn’t the sharpest tool in the shed. The rumors about the son, I don’t know. But I *really* doubt he’s the person in the ghetto most qualified to serve in the office of President.”

Jansky said nothing but gave an unconvinced look.

“I understand the instinct here,” Vinov whispered. “If an average guy, or even an ordinary rich guy, tells you ‘I have a plan to overthrow the President,’ your natural response is to say, ‘good God, this idiot is gonna get himself in a KZ, and me too if I associate with him.’ But when a council member says it, it’s a different game.”

“You think there’s any chance we can convince seven people to elect Yuri Maslak?”

“Yes. And we could do it with six. If the council deadlocks, the Kripo just picks whoever, probably on the advice of the Main Ghetto. Nobody wants that.”

“Why?” Despite its name, the “main” ghetto was dwarfed by the North Kyiv Ghetto. It had a more working-class profile, with most of its people working in the service sector in the American and Indian suburbs.

Vinov shrugged and began speaking at normal volume. “I don’t know why our pillar leadership dislikes their pillar leadership. They say it’s because they oppress their people. Maybe that’s it. Maybe it’s not. But I’ve never heard anyone say anything positive about them or deny that the feud occurs.”

“So if there is a compromise candidate, it’d be someone else, from Berlin or Hamburg or Moscow.” Jansky was speaking softly but no longer whispering.

“In theory. In practice, Anton Linov won’t consider anyone not named Linov as any kind of compromise. We might as well go for Maslak.”

Jansky sighed. “You know this thing used to happen all the time in the Siberian Rump,” he said, referring to the Russian state that existed from 1942

to 1969. “One man supports the National Liberal Republican Party and attempts to convince his Social-Democratic friend to change his mind. Friendships were strained and ended by these debates. Smart people looked down on the ‘uneducated’ for their apolitical attitude, but considering pure self-interest, it was perfectly rational.”

Vinov gave him a look of recognition. He had read Jansky’s drafts of *Prison of the Nation*, which included a chapter on the pre-WWIII political system. “The ending of friendship needn’t happen here,” Vinov said, though it didn’t sound like his heart was in it.

“Have you met any members of the Pillar Council apart from our friend?” Jansky asked in a normal voice.

Vinov smiled and spoke normally. “Yes. Not all of them liked me,” he said, smiling.

Perhaps he meant ‘none of them liked me,’ Jansky thought. “Why not?” he asked.

Vinov had a look of contemplation. “Sometimes you can understand ‘social skills’ in theory while having difficulty putting them into practice. You know that people don’t like to be talked down to, but when faced with someone you know is much less knowledgeable than yourself, it can be hard to use the right tones, facial expressions, and so on, to hide it.”

Or, Jansky thought, perhaps your social theory is no good. But he didn’t think so. Vinov did seem to have a great deal of sociological insight.

“Perhaps you’ll be better at it,” Vinov said.

“Perhaps I will,” Jansky said. “If I meet such people, what will they be like.”

Vinov did not look happy to hear Jansky’s ‘if.’ “You will find a ruling class that feels the need to justify its position. It does so because, despite the comparison to the ancient nobilities, it is not so all-powerful. The rich businessman of both the Old Money and the New Money firm can take his bank balance and move to Berlin if he doesn’t feel respected. That’s a major factor up there, respect. The poor man will suffer through an insulting and degrading job environment to bring home bacon to his children. For the rich man, the difference between one and two million isn’t that great. He will take the former and respect over the latter and no respect. So when he sees that the same families keep running things, keep getting their sons appointed to the council, he expects them to have some excuse for it.”

Jansky looked at Vinov skeptically.

“What,” Vinov said, “You thought I’d say something different than what I said in public?”

There had been several meetings dedicated to the topic of ‘ruling class self-perception’ and a chapter about the subject in Vinov’s *The Russians of North Kyiv*. But Vinov spoke in a general tone, not saying how high up the totem pole he had climbed and conducted interviews. Until last week Jansky would have thought he had only talked to one pillar councilman, Yuri Maslak.

Jansky continued to eye Vinov skeptically. He hoped the quiet, skeptical, unpleased look would cajole Vinov into revealing something he wouldn't otherwise reveal, though he didn't have anything particular in mind.

"Anyway," Vinov said, "I've been thinking of a topic for a future Glanzia Forum meeting. It will be a meta-story, a story about a story. You know I always say to be suspicious of stories."

Jansky smiled briefly. "Be suspicious of stories" was one of Vinov's rationalist heuristics. Stories were pleasing to tell and pleasing to listen to. Storytellers get attached to their stories and are much more reluctant to subject them to scrutiny than "dry, unemotional facts." A physicist may readily update his estimate of the binding energy of a Carbon-12 atom but would be much more reluctant to update his story-like mental image of what the atom was, an image he shared with colleagues, students, family, and friends. To compensate, the rationalist should hold stories up to extra scrutiny relative to facts and figures.

"The story starts in Rostok, a town on the Baltic not yet swallowed up by Berlin. There are two ghettos, West Rostok for Africans and East Rostok for Russians. West Rostok is a peculiar ghetto. It is partly a 'retirement ghetto' for rich Africans. You know how Americans will talk about retiring to a beach somewhere? Well, Rostok is that for the Africans, though they aren't allowed on the beach. They can go to the beach houses and clean them; not everyone in the West Rostok Ghetto is rich. On one of the beaches are two neighboring houses, one with an African maid and another with a Russian maid. One day the masters of the homes are elsewhere and the two maids are sitting in the backyards and chatting through the fence. The African maid tells a grand tale. About the former President from South Hamburg who fought a bloody power struggle with knives, clubs, even guns. Who lost and was exiled to Rostok. Who is plotting to gain power back, though the Nazis will only accept his son, not himself. The Russian maid is skeptical. How would *she* know? Do exiled 'princes' associate with maids? But it's an entertaining story and if she retells it, then hey, maybe some of that Princely cachet will rub off on her."

"So she tells it to her neighbor back in her ghetto, who's a bit more affluent than she is. He thinks, 'hey, an entertaining story.' And he retells it but doesn't specify the source. It's just 'someone I know.' And it gets told and retold until eventually, it gets back here, home, our ghetto. Where the ruling class needs a justification to rule. And here it is, point to South Hamburg, say, 'you wouldn't want this happening to us, would you?'"

"So what's the truth?"

Vinov shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine."

Jansky realized what Vinov was doing. Changing the subject, but in a subtle way. He wanted to engage Jansky in an intellectual discussion, remind him that most people were not intellectual, indeed, that most regarded him as a 'nerd.' That the Glanzia Forum was his home, whether he liked it or not. Jansky would play along but continue his frustrated and dissatisfied act. "I

want to know your actual opinion,” he said. “Are the stories about violence in South Hamburg true? Partly true but exaggerated? Entirely made up?”

“Same thing I said in the meeting,” Vinov said. “It’s unknowable. I mean, suppose there was a knife fight on 23 Street happening at this very moment. We wouldn’t hear it. We’d be told after the fact, but it’s unlikely anyone we’d know would be a firsthand witness. The pillar would deny it and the Nazi newspapers would say nothing about it. But we do know the situation here, the various personalities and such, and could say, well, that’s not consistent with his persona, and so on. What can we know about South Hamburg, a ghetto we cannot enter? If you put a gun to my head, I would probably say there is substantial truth to the claims of violence in South Hamburg. But it’s also possible it’s made up. Only thing we can know for sure is that the Presidents of South Hamburg ‘resign’ quite often. But maybe that’s just a tradition they have down at the Hamburg Kripo station. ‘Every so and so years, we depose the President and bring in someone else.’”

Jansky smiled. “But regardless of whether it’s true, the pillar councilmen want to believe it?”

“Yes,” Vinov said. “According to the story, South Hamburg is violent because all the power is concentrated in one person, the President, who makes the decisions about everything himself. But if you’re being stepped on, there’s a ‘way out.’ If councilmen are constantly showing up with daggers in the back, the Nazis will decide that the President has failed to ‘keep order in the ghetto,’ so depose him and bring in another Prince. One need not ‘win the war,’ merely ‘firing shots’ can result in victory. The prince who comes in knows this and has an incentive to strike hard against real or imagined enemies. Ghettos like our own avoid this through ‘collective leadership.’ The idea is that nobody is left in a position where their back is to the wall and they feel they have nothing to lose. This provides a ready excuse for inaction. If you’re a councilman and some businessman complains about some firstborn mediocrity in some high government post, you can say, ‘we can’t depose him because of collective leadership. The idea may have started as a self-interested story that the people telling it did not really believe. But gradually, people born into the milieu, who went to *Mykhajlo Antonyuk*, the old money, the new money, the sons and nephews of councilman, they just accepted it as common knowledge. Most people don’t hold up their beliefs to any kind of scrutiny. They just believe what others around them believe.”

“So that’s why I shouldn’t be particularly worried about Linov’s threats,” Jansky whispered.

“You should worry, but you shouldn’t live your life cowering in fear,” Vinov whispered. “I know the situation is frustrating to you. You want the council to choose either Maslak, so you can continue your ascent, or Linov, so you and I and the rest of us can get it over with and start our lives in another ghetto. Maybe we’d continue our Glanzia meetings in a public library somewhere. But the councilmen won’t do it. And Linov and Maslak do not

want to try to force them to do so because in the culture of ‘collective leadership,’ nobody wants to look like the guy who ‘started it.’”

Jansky, in fact, was undecided about who he would ‘side with,’ though he was certainly leaning toward Maslak. Maslak had said much the same things as Vinov did and Jansky wondered how close the two were. Did they coordinate beforehand? Quite possibly, they did. “What about Linov’s accusations,” Jansky whispered. That...”

“I know what they are,” Vinov whispered. “And,” he said, returning to normal voice, “it’s unsurprising. In the culture of collective leadership, going to the Nazis and complaining is the squeamish equivalent of setting off a bomb. You don’t need to convince them of your case. Just make them think the President has ‘lost control,’ and they’ll depose the entire council and bring in another. Oh, and do a raid and kill a dozen innocent people. So it’s something that one should never do unless his back is to the wall and in the culture of collective leadership, nobody’s back is ever to the wall.”

“I’m sure you’re familiar with the idea of a non-denial denial,” Jansky whispered. Vinov’s statement seemed to deny the accusation while not actually doing so.

Vinov looked guilty and sullen for a split second. “That’s fair,” he whispered. “Linov’s accusation is false, plain and simple.”

A part of Jansky felt relieved and wanted to make a show of loyalty right then and there to Maslak, Vinov, and his great and good friends. But a larger part of them screamed, “not yet. Don’t be a fool!”

“Okay,” Jansky whispered. “Linov certainly does not seem trustworthy. But for me, I want to draw a red line that says if Maslak asks me to do this, this, or this, I will not do so. Have you established mental red lines?”

“I do not desire to answer your question,” Vinov said.

Jansky briefly felt an urge to smile. Vinov had, in a Glanzia Forum meeting about nine months back, mocked people who say they ‘cannot do X’ or ‘cannot do Y’ when in reality, they mean ‘the costs of doing X seem in my estimation to exceed the benefits.’ He knew Jansky would have cornered him with this if he said, “I can’t tell you.”

“Well, I do have read lines. Three, to be precise.”

Vinov held up a hand. “Stop,” he said

“Okay.”

“It’s a common tactic when you want someone to tell you X, Y, Z. Share your own X, Y, Z, so the person you’re asking feels some kind of obligation to reciprocate even though they didn’t propose or agree to any such deal.”

“Point taken.”

“So you won’t find me a jerk if, after sharing your own X, Y, and Z, I do not reciprocate in the slightest?”

“I will not find you a jerk,” Jansky said.

“Alright, go ahead.”

Jansky began to whisper. “One. Any request to involve the Kripo, directly

or indirectly, unless it is to publish someone who is guilty of the crime they are being accused of. Two: any request to condemn Linov in a public venue. Three: any request to involve the Americans, Indians, or any non-Russian group in this dynastic struggle.”

He did not say out loud a fourth red line, any act of violence not directed against a guilty party. He could tell himself this was out of a fear that Vinov would not agree. Part of him wondered if it was motivated by a fear that he’d end up walking back on it later.

Vinov smiled. “I’m not sure what to say,” he whispered.

“I take it if I asked who else knows about....”

“I would not answer,” Vinov interrupted.

“Okay,” said Jansky. “I’ve taken up enough of your mourning. I guess I should get going.”

“Yes,” Vinov said. He reached out and shook Jansky’s hand.

Jansky turned and walked out the door, past Lara Vinov, who was scrubbing a stack of dishes in the kitchen sink and did not respond to Jansky. He walked out the front door and closed it behind him, feeling half relieved and half disappointed.

Vinov hadn’t shared any ‘new’ information. But he was reassured by Vinov’s forceful denial of Linov’s main accusation against Maslak. Suppose that Maslak had blackmailed Linov using the KBA and suppose there were still KBA men who remembered it and could tell Jansky about it. Maslak and Vinov would have been wise to say it was a misunderstanding, that things spiraled out of control, or that one of their younger followers had done something on his own. He thought back to a meeting shortly after Jansky joined Glanzia, where they discussed the novel *Gates of War*. In it, there is a political party whose leader makes bombastic speeches that are meant to be taken in a propagandistic context but are taken literally by some of the young and dumb followers. A “political” war spirals into a real live-fire war. Maslak had mockingly compared the party to Glanzia, and Jansky hadn’t thought much of it at the time. Could something similar have happened? No, Jansky thought, for it violated Occam’s Razor. Maslak wanted Linov’s position. Linov didn’t want to give it to him. That was the origin of the “feud,” more was not necessary.

He thought about what he would think were he reading a novel about the life of Toma Jansky. Were there any parts that seemed unrealistic, poorly written, or inexplicable? His current situation did seem a bit suspect. On the one hand, he was put between two powerful enemies, Anton Linov and Yuri Maslak, and was in a position to “choose,” yet he didn’t need to do so immediately. Both wanted him to stay where he was, keep going to work at Dador, keep writing his book, keep up a façade to the outside world that he was just an everyday Joe. But this would not always be true. Maslak would eventually introduce him to the Power Players and would want him to toe a certain line. To win them over in a way that Ivan Vinov evidently could not.

And Linov would not want him to remain a passive “spy” forever. Eventually, he’d demand that Jansky take his side. Jansky would have to make a real decision, Linov or Maslak.

There was another possibility. Maslak would bring Jansky to the party, introduce him to the power players, and Jansky would screw up. Say things that offended them or, less obviously, simply be uninteresting. Make himself look nervous and tell Maslak he could not control it. Make himself gradually less useful to both Linov and Maslak. But he was already dangerous to them, he knew their secrets, and it would be bad to be in a position where one is dangerous but not useful to the powerful. But then, he thought, was that just a self-serving rationalization for his inherent desire to climb into a position of wealth and power? Perhaps. He’d have to think about it more.

Chapter 7

Heinrich Himmler faced many dilemmas at the beginning of 1970. With the external enemies vanquished, the age-old dispute between the “capitalist” and “socialist” factions of the N.S.D.A.P. was reigniting. The plans to settle the East with Germans had failed, as Germans had few children and those with wanderlust wanted to move to the cities or the suburbs of their familiar country, not LARP as ‘warrior-peasants’ in the East. He had conquered vast territories in America and the British Empire, but there were simply not enough Germans to fill up the bureaucracies in those lands. The obvious solution was to leave the local elites in place. They could staff the local governments and rebuild local industries, paying taxes to the Reich and lip service to its ideology. But these local elites would privately despise the Reich and exert influence over their people to maintain their “bourgeoisie democratic” ideology. And weren’t they, after all, ‘fellow Aryans’ who should eventually be assimilated to Germandom? This idea was unpopular among rank-and-file Nazis, but Himmler was old and his thinking was rigid. He had to at least try.

To co-opt the elites would require them to be brought to Germany. But ten million Germans had been made homeless by the nuclear bombings, and the German people did want to see anyone other than POWs doing construction work brought in. And the fact that so many Germans hated the Anglo-Americans would make it more difficult to “win them over” in Germany itself. The solution would be found in the East. Universities would be built and the local elites of Indiana and New Zealand would be strongly encouraged to send their children there. In time, more and more government jobs would require credentials from the institutions. But it was not just government that would build up the “51st state;” the private sector would have a role to play. The Nazis had nuked all the American auto factories, but many skilled workers and executives survived. The German car industry had mostly escaped destruction, having the tools to make the tools to make the tools.

Himmler made a deal with Germany's private auto companies. In return for ceding some control over German factories to the state, German companies received shares of a new company, the German Auto Confederation. (*Deutscher Autobund*, DAB.)

DAB received the patents, drawings, and trademarks from Ford, Chrysler, and GM, along with land in Kyiv to build factories and subsidized Reichsbank loans. American workers would provide the know-how and Russians from Siberia would provide unskilled labor. Conditions in America were so bad that most, from the auto-executive to the assembly line worker, were willing to leave their homes for a steady job at a relatively high wage. If that wasn't enough, local governments were told that if Americans did not "volunteer," then other methods of tribute would be required. Eventually, the Americans would settle down permanently in the area and, establishing themselves above the Russian helot-class, would have an interest in continued Nazi rule. Eventually, they might be "Germanized," accomplishing the Germanization of the "East." Himmler's successors would never permit the last step, and one wonders if Himmler suspected this.

The urban society of Ukraine that existed in 1941 had largely been destroyed by the Nazis. Kyiv in 1941 had 900,000 people, mass murder and emigration to Siberia reduced this to 200,000 by 1945. Now the Russians were being brought "back," but to a new and radically different social order. At the top were the Germans, followed by the Americans, followed by the local Ukrainians, with the Siberian Russians at the bottom. While the Ukrainians would eventually be forced into urban ghettos, it was considered desirable at the time to keep them separate from the Russian deportees. The North Kyiv Ghetto was built away from the decaying old city of Kyiv, surrounded by the DAB factories. Its population consisted of 300,000 deportees from the Omsk area, 100,000 from Khabarovsk in the Russian Far East, and a few thousand Russian peasants from Central Asia. Nearly all were of peasant, working-class, or lower-middle-class origin, as those with money and connections had been exempted from deportation. This difference in social origins between the Russian deportees and the American "voluntary settlers" attenuated their differences and probably helped the Americans buy into "subhuman" propaganda.

This was the world that Timur Sergev met as he arrived in the North Kyiv Ghetto on October 22, 1973. His life had been relatively unsuccessful prior to this. He had done poorly in school and failed to get any but unskilled jobs afterward. The path that led to his rise began with his decision to volunteer for deportation. The ghetto was basically a giant labor camp run by *Organisation Todt*, building the DAB factories and the *plattenbau* of the ghetto. The ghetto's pillar was basically synonymous with the ghetto police, who took orders from O.T. officials and oversaw the columns of workers. Between the ghetto police and the workers was Timur Sergev, who, as one of the early deportees, was a natural choice to supervise those who came later. The ghetto

police were soon hated by the workers and Sergev tried hard to distance himself from them. But the most hated and feared were the German soldiers, who would habitually come into the ghetto and begin shooting if they felt disrespected. Though the people hated the ghetto police and, to a lesser extent, supervisors like Sergev, there were no whisperings of an organized campaign of resistance. Work slowdowns were localized, handled sometimes by bullets from German soldiers but more often by firings. Unemployment was high and those who could not work went hungry. Those who could not work and did not have people to support them starved.

Sergev had no romantic interests before his deportation, but in December 1973, he began to date a woman, Azarova Vitalievna. They married three months later. She was from a working-class family, had studied in America on a scholarship, and was anti-communist. Timur's parents still thought in prewar political terms and objected to the marriage. Timur, by this time, wrote that he no longer cared. She was beautiful, kind, and, important to him, could teach him English. Their first son was born in 1976.

Over the next few years, plattenbau went up and deportation trains arrived. Disease was rampant and deaths exceeded births by three times. Surrounding the ghetto was a single barbed-wire fence, opened during daylight hours. Escaping the ghetto was easy but survival was not, and Sergev conjectured that most who escaped later returned. By the summer of 1977, however, conditions had definitively improved. In part, this was because so many of the elderly and disabled had already died off. Additionally, the DAB factories were starting to come online and “full employment” was said to be achieved. Though DAB desired to pay its workers as little as possible, floor-level managers found a small degree of pay-for-performance beneficial. Workers now had a little to spend. Supervisors like Sergev, who continued to oversee maintenance work on the plattenbau, had more. Richest of all, yet still quite poor by modern standards, were the ghetto police.

Outside the ghetto, beyond the factories, were the so-called “Americatowns” established for American settlers. In theory, they were based on American-style suburban housing. In practice, they were smaller and shoddily constructed, though still superior to the plattenbau. The Americans took their place below the German owners of DAB and above the Russian proletarians. It was a strange new society, where nobody except the German DAB men wanted to be there. The Russians wanted to be in Siberia, the Americans wanted to be in America, and the German soldiers wished they had been deployed to the richer lands of Britain, America, or Germany itself. The Ukrainian peasants who had been displaced to build the new world looked on with anger and some bemusement.

After the ghetto was finished, *Organisation Todt* moved on, replaced by DAB as the “authority” over the ghetto. Slowdowns became much more serious given full employment and the specialized skills many workers were gaining in the auto factories. Additionally, while the men of O.T. had

extensive experience dealing with Russians, the men of DAB did not. They did not speak Russian and had no desire to learn. They considered the ghetto police their employees and ordered them to arrest labor agitators. But the Germans refused to arm the ghetto police, who lived in fear of riots. In this difficult position, the easiest out was to arrest the powerless and unpopular and tell the Germans they were “labor agitators.” These men disappeared into the camp system while the real agitators continued their activity.

Timur Sergev the communist looked on with indifference. His concerns were his wife, his children, and saving enough money to pay the Nazis a ransom and move back to Omsk. Soon he found an opportunity. Despite the slowdowns, DAB seemed to be doing well, its stock price went up and it could afford to pay its American employees well. They had money to fix all the defects in their shoddily constructed housing. In May of 1977, Timur Sergev resigned his job with the pillar and set up his construction business. He went from house to house in the Americatowns, handing out fliers. Starting with a few men irregularly employed in 1977, he expanded to dozens of employees by 1980. His success owed much to his ability to speak English well, which he sharpened by reading English magazines and novels. He claimed to be a fan of the West, telling his customers he knew English because he was planning to attend an American university before the war. In actuality, he had great contempt for the customer base of “collaborators” and took pride in “ripping them off.” By 1982, he employed hundreds of people and was trusted and well-liked by many of his customers.

Yet he had to be careful to hide his wealth. The ghetto police were rapacious in shaking down “the rich” for “taxes.” Sergev dressed like an ordinary worker, wore the cheapest watch he could find, and claimed his spacious apartment was inhabited by multiple families. He employed accounting tricks to make his mid-level managers appear as independent contractors. By this time, he no longer wanted to move back to Omsk. Why leave such an opportunity behind? As Sergev was getting rich, so, too, were those who invested in DAB. The stock price kept climbing even as the firm never turned a profit. German investors took tours around selected areas in the factory complex, where they weren’t told about the labor slowdowns. It was explained that once the Texan oil fields came back online, middle-class Germans would be able to afford to buy cars and the company would start turning a profit. The goal of the Four Year Plan to repair the Texan oil fields and have production exceed its prewar level would not bear fruit until the fracking boom of the 2060s. Many diarists would pretend they “predicted” the 1983 crash of DAB’s stock price. Sergev is the only one who actually did so.

Even before the downturn, Sergev’s business was starting to suffer from competition from new American-owned companies. The downturn led to many layoffs of American employees, who could not afford to purchase Sergev’s services. The competitors suffered as well, but they had help from the Gauleiter. On March 21, 1984, Sergev was arrested by the Kripo during

one of his visits to Americatown. He spent eleven days in the Soviet-era jail in the old city, never charged with a crime. On release, he was warned against continuing his business. He took the warning and “retired,” unable to get his old job with the pillar back. Yet his fortune was substantial enough to weather the downturn comfortably. DAB went bankrupt in 1984 and sold off its assets. The massive factory complex was converted into a patchwork of smaller factories producing motorcycles, radios, washing machines, and so on. The new industrialists, a mix of Americans and Germans, no longer faced labor activism as the downturn created mass unemployment.

DAB had adopted strict policies that restricted Russians to the bottom of the company hierarchy. The new factory owners were more open to Russians in positions of power, realizing they could be effective middle-managers. A new class of wealthy Russians started to emerge, one with the ear of businessmen who, in turn, had the ear of the Kripo. In 1985, 1986, and 1988, the “pillar council” of the North Kyiv Ghetto, at the time equivalent to the ghetto police leadership, was fired en masse. Their subordinates replaced them and, predictably, nothing changed. In 1990, however, the Kripo experimented with a new form of ghetto governance. This would allow Timur Sergev to come out of “hiding” and take his place in the ghetto’s elite.

Jansky was interrupted in his typing by a knock. He looked up from his computer and saw Alya Semko walking away from his office and knocking on the others. He put his laptop in his desk and walked into the main office, meeting Orlov, Egorov, and the Semkos.

Alya Semko looked toward Jansky and then turned to her son. “You remember the situation I warned you about? An unexpected visit?”

Jansky did. A current client or a prospective client with a great deal of money wanted to meet them. Immediately, without them having the opportunity to “prepare.” Semko had analogized it to a “health code visit,” which, for obvious reasons, are not scheduled in advance. Jansky nodded, as did Maxim Semko.

“Man’s name is Paul Doyle. He’s a ‘well-respected’ American who is considering investing with our firm. I talked about our strategy with Foster. Although Doyle wants to meet the entire team, we cannot do so as we don’t want to look desperate and don’t want to give the impression we’re just sitting twiddling our thumbs all day. We’re busy people. Lazar and Maxim are in a meeting with the leading lawyers of the ghetto. Pearson is in Berlin attending the meeting of the World Economic Forum. The three of us,” she said, pointing to Jansky and Egorov, “must leave at once. Remember, those two are meeting with lawyers, not a public meeting. We don’t need to say where or when it is. Pearson is in Berlin, World Economic Forum, we don’t need to provide any more detail than that, but you must remember Berlin, World Economic Forum.”

Jansky and Egorov nodded. He knew Semko’s firm tone was really directed against him, the newbie.

Semko walked over to the printer and pulled out three sheets of paper, handing one to Jansky and Egorov and keeping one for herself. It was the “pass” signed by Foster that would give the three permission to exit the ghetto. Jansky walked back into his office and got his backpack out of his backpack. He put the paper next to his OST badges; he had four, one for his front and back and two spares. He wouldn’t need to bring anything else; all the firm’s “propaganda” was present in its external office. He walked back and joined Semko and Egorov, who walked immediately out of the office and toward the elevator.

It had been one month since Jansky learned of the Linov-Maslak feud. He wrote “spy reports” for Linov, telling him of his meeting with Vinov and saying Vinov was ‘euded all my questions,’ which was not far from the truth. He also wrote that he desired to meet Taras Linov. The handoff to officer Pavlov was uneventful and he had not heard back from Linov. He had decided that he would side with Maslak and do everything possible to help him depose Linov short of his “red lines.” This, of course, included trying to be good at his job. Impress Semko, win her and himself more money. Win the firm this new client. Though he was ninety percent sure the “client” was not real. He, Toma Jansky, was being tested. He had been writing investment reports for a year; they knew he was good at it. But they were unsure of his ability to lie to a man’s face, to keep his cool when that man called him out on his lies. They would test him before they sent him into “battle,” and what better test than a situation he thinks is the real thing?

Should he tell her of his suspicion? A smart man, after all, would be able to “figure it out.” But he got the feeling there was an unwritten rule that a smart man who figured it out shouldn’t say so. He should play along.

As Jansky, Egorov, and Semko boarded the elevator, descended to the first floor, and then walked toward the exit, Jansky thought about his boss, her motivations and worldview. There were three people Jansky knew were part of Maslak’s “inner circle,” who knew about the time capsule and Maslak’s feud with Linov. They were Vinov, Sorokin, and Semko. He had not done with Sorokin what he did with Vinov, asking him if maybe Maslak wasn’t so great after all. He and Sorokin were not that close and Jansky thought he had largely joined the Glanzia Forum as a means to gain political power. He had given more consideration to cornering Semko but decided against it. The ultimate measure of a rationalist, Vinov had said, was the ability to be self-critical, to analyze one’s own motives, to pick apart one’s own self-serving rationalizations. Vinov did this well. Some of the others, like Soso Isayev, could also do it. Jansky thought he could do it. He did not think Semko could.

He thought about how Semko compared to his wife, Nora Jansky. Both were women involved in the male-dominated “nerd culture” of the Glanzia Forum and both were very intelligent. Yet Nora kept it at arm’s length. She wasn’t interested in science fiction and she spoke in the linguistically pure, high-status register of Russian in contrast to the middle-class dialect that was

standard at the Forum. Semko, in contrast, was part of it through and through and had been so from the beginning. She did not fit the stereotype of the “nerd girl” who joined at the eleventh hour to find a husband when her biological clock was going off and the guy she actually liked was married or had no money. She was accepted as part of the ingroup by everyone. And it had been very good to her. Why would she consider going against its leader?

The three boarded a bus and rode in silence; they couldn’t well talk strategy in public and didn’t have the appetite for small talk. They went through the Sugenlar uneventfully, it was one o’clock and there was not much of a crowd. They then got on another bus for the ride to the office, which was about twenty blocks down Vanbar Street. They arrived at the building, a rectangular box twelve stories tall with a lobby that seemed absurdly large. They had to go past security; it seemed that no subhuman, no matter how important, could get an automated card. They then boarded the elevator and ascended to the seventh-floor office. Semko pressed the buzzer on the door that opened a short while later by Dylan Foster himself.

Foster had short brown hair and green eyes and wore a gray suit and a light blue tie. He was neither ugly nor handsome, looking like the typical American everyman. He was always polite to Jansky but never especially friendly. “Doyle’s in the other room,” he said.

Dador’s Vanbar Street office was, by the standards of most Vanbar Street stonk firms, nothing special. In the front was the “game room,” with a pool table, two foosball tables, a dozen chairs, and a series of books, some for children. A ghetto dweller who worked in an office of three hundred would consider himself lucky to work somewhere with a “game room” as large as this one for two employees and the occasional visitor. Jansky was always careful to suppress his sense of jealousy and disgust. But it slipped out at times, as when Foster told him the “game room” was for the clients’ children. Weren’t the clients all wealthy enough to afford full-time nannies? Why would any bring their kid to Dador? He didn’t ask these questions, but he must have shown how he felt in his facial expression because Foster shot him a confused look. There were firms of similar wealth in the ghetto, but they would never display it so openly. That was for the private penthouse.

The three walked past the game room into the meeting room, where a man, presumably Doyle, was seated at the end of the long oval table with eighteen chairs. Jansky doubted if there had ever been a meeting with eighteen people, but the perception made the firm seem grander than it was. The room had been professionally decorated, with the walls, floor, miniature couch, table, and chairs all colored white, brown, or tan. Hanging on the room’s shorter walls were two flat-screen televisions. On one of the longer walls was a window currently covered with a large tan curtain. On the other wall was a large, impressive painting of the Chicago skyline.

The three Russians walked over to Doyle. “Here they are,” Foster said. “Alya Semko, Vladimir Egorov, and Toma Jansky,” he said. Each person

reached forward to shake Doyle's hand. “

Hello,” the man said, smiling. “My name is Paul Doyle.”

Doyle looked to be around forty, with blond hair, green eyes, and a funny, if not necessarily ugly, look. He wore a black sweater with a white geometrical pattern, perhaps countersignaling the fact that he was so important he didn't need to dress up. “Dylan here has told me so much about his team of hyper-intelligent Russians,” said Doyle. He said it with a hint of friendly condescension as if he was almost certain his friend was bulls***ing him.

The five sat down at one end of the table. Doyle looked to Jansky, then turned to Dylan Foster. “I'd like to speak specifically to the young man, alone, if that's alright,” said Doyle.

“I'm afraid not,” Foster said. “It's a standard practice in this industry not to allow outsiders to have private meetings with employees on company time. For all I know, you could be a headhunter looking to raid us for talent.”

Doyle did not look surprised by the refusal. “Alright then,” he said. “I guess we can talk here, the three of us,” he said, looking to Egorov and Semko.

Foster looked to Semko, who stood up, as did Egorov. Semko turned to Doyle. “We'll be in the other room, if you want to talk to us,” she said. She and Egorov walked to Foster's private office and closed the door. Foster went and closed the door to the front room, then sat down with the other two. Jansky faced Doyle, with Foster between the two men. On the table were some folders with promotional material he presumed Foster and Doyle had discussed.

“So, Mr. Jansky,” Doyle said, “give me the pitch for your company in three sentences.”

He thought about it briefly. “We are an investment firm that specializes in publicly traded second-tier firms that are based in the North Kyiv area and rely on Russian employees. We seek to cut through these firms' PR-speak and establish their true valuation. We buy if we expect them to grow and short if we expect them to shrink.”

“So you're like a venture capital firm?” asked Doyle.

From the tone, Jansky concluded that Doyle knew quite well what a venture capital firm was and that Dador was not one. “Not exactly. We specialize in publicly traded companies. We don't typically buy and hold or attempt to change the firm's management practices. We buy and sell soon after or we trade on short-term futures.”

“So you're like any actively managed stock fund?”

“In part. The main difference between the big firms and us is that we focus on local, second-tier companies. We do not attempt to determine the valuation of companies like Bayer, as it is far too large for our team to be able to understand.”

“I take it you don't believe in the EMH,” he said, sounding out each letter

on the acronym “efficient market hypothesis.”

“I do believe in the efficient market hypothesis,” said Jansky firmly. “The problem is people that people misunderstand what it means. It means you can’t beat the market with *public* information. Our trades are informed by information that is not public.”

“Okay,” Doyle said in a noncommittal tone of voice. “Give me a toy example of the typical company you can find non-public information on.”

“Sure,” Jansky said, smiling. “The company, I’ll call it Tech Solutions, is a web design company, small, publicly-traded, second-tier. It begins to develop tools to automate the process of web development. If successful, it could corner the market for low-end web design. Its valuation has risen due to the prototypes it has shown to the investors and the general public. The governing board of this company is entirely American, but the few thousand employees are mostly Russians who live and work in the North Kyiv Ghetto. The company’s high-level managers are Russian, as are the mid-level managers, and so on. At the lowest level are the programmers, who exaggerate the effectiveness of their tool to their bosses, who exaggerate it to their bosses, and so on, up to the governing board, who don’t know what’s really going on. In the ghetto, we often use a Chinese phrase to refer to this situation: ‘the mountains are high and the emperor is far away.’ The programmers and lower-level managers in the company, because they are Russian, cannot buy and sell company stock. Can’t short it either. But we can. Of course, we don’t trade based on some employee badmouthing his company. We only do so if we can find hard evidence. And often we can. Recall the prototype I mentioned. There might be a flaw in it. A minor flaw that would take many months of exhaustive search to find if you don’t know where to look. But if you do, you can confirm it’s there in fifteen minutes.”

“And what do the company’s employees get for providing you this information?”

“They get nothing,” Jansky said, smiling.

“So you get something for nothing?”

Jansky smiled again. “It’s not just stinginess that explains why we don’t pay our informants. If they got paid, they’d have an incentive to build fake problems into their systems. They give us information for the oldest reason in the world. Personal tension in the workplace.”

“And how do you find the people with this inside information?”

“Sometimes they come to us. Our business model is an open secret in the ghetto.”

“But not always. Sometimes you go to them?”

“Yes.”

“How?”

Jansky smiled. “The ghetto is like everywhere else,” Jansky said, “programmers have friends who are programmers, doctors have friends who are doctors, and so on. We ask around. We do have some strategies in

addition to that, which for obvious reasons, we cannot share with a prospective client. But mostly, it's just asking friends of friends."

Doyle smiled. "I've been to many offices like this. It's common to hear this same pitch. They say what everyone already knows. That the vast majority of technical talent here is Russian, and that any company that wants to make money must hire them and compensate them well because they know what's really going on and we Americans do not. So how are you different from them?"

Jansky was taken aback by the claim. But he knew how he should respond, Foster had told him so many months before. "My elders have told me that that was not always true. It is largely this company that made it true. People heard about it and asked *Gilcher* and *Seveno* why they were not doing the same. And *Gilcher* and *Seveno* now say they are. But," Jansky said, picking up a folder labeled "investment reports," "can they produce this? Can they go into detail? Or is it just a vague 'we hire *Russians*, even though we can't credit them publicly, wink-wink-nudge-nudge?'"

Doyle took the reports from Jansky and begun to leaf through them. "I'll admit these reports are impressive," Doyle said. "You expect me to look at these reports, see all the big words, and be impressed. Likewise," he said, picking up a folder labeled "financial performance," "you expect me to not look very closely at the numbers here. Be bamboozled by these facts and figures, charts and sidebars. Because I'm an heir who didn't actually do anything to earn his money, like all your clients. Isn't that right, Mr. Jansky?"

Jansky smiled. "You seem to me to be quite intelligent and knowledgeable, and those numbers are accurate."

"How flattering," Doyle said. He smiled briefly, then went back to reading. He read in silence for about ten minutes, occasionally turning the pages. Jansky made a conscious effort not to appear bored.

Doyle put down the folder and turned back to Jansky. "So what do you guys think of National Socialism?"

Jansky was taken aback by the question. He looked to Foster, who didn't seem surprised. He now had very little doubt about what was happening. This was a test of Jansky. Doyle was Foster's friend. Perhaps a distant cousin.

"Depends on the person," Jansky said. "Most Russians, I would think, would prefer a different system."

"And what do you think of us?"

"Again, depends on the person."

"What about you, personally?"

"Well, I guess I've always been somewhat of an Anglophile. As a kid, I liked the old English science fiction books, though I only ever read them in German translation. I haven't had time to actually learn English. I'll just say that I understand why people do what they do; who is really in charge and who is really responsible for the system."

"Cryptic," Doyle said. He paused for a few seconds. "So," he said. "I

have a theory about how your firm works. Suppose you investigate a company and find nothing to ‘trade on.’ What do you do with the money?”

“We go look at another company, and in the meantime, we invest the money in a low-cost index fund.”

“The low-cost index fund can be expected to make money over time?”

“Yes.”

“So this, in combination with short bets, can make money over time even if the short bets fail to make any money at all?”

“In principle, yes. But if you look at those documents, it’s clear that our shorts do make money, averaged out.”

“Yes, but that’s not hard in principle to do. Most of these tiny companies do decline in value over time.”

“And others shoot to the moon.”

“Yes. And if you structured your betting in a way such that most of the time you gain a little bit of money with a small chance of losing it all, you could generate a small gain through the shorts.”

“We do many shorts. If we are operating blindly, we would not be making money. You can’t make money from gambling, no matter what kind of clever system you think up.”

“Suppose you shorted one of these *stonks*. What will happen, on average? Will you lose money or gain it?”

“You will gain a small amount of money. Then when you do the same the next year, you win some money. Then a third year, win some money. Then a fourth year, you lose all your money. The expected value is zero. We do many shorts.”

“Yes, many. But it’s possible in principle to only have a few large shorts and many smaller ones. And if all else fails, you can take the money you pay yourselves in your own private accounts, then use it to short the stonk personally and make the price go down. Effectively you transfer money from yourself to the company. You then get the number on a page saying you make money over time, get more clients, and pay yourself back several times over. Something for nothing. Here’s what I don’t see here on these pages. The return from the shorts compared to the return from when you put the money in a low-cost index fund. Because the former will exceed the latter,” he said.

“Are you going to report this theory to the Economic Regulation Board?”

“No. I want to hear you deny it first.”

“I deny it,” he said. He looked into Doyle’s eyes, expecting him to say the whole thing was a test but still worried about the small possibility that it wasn’t.

“That won’t be necessary,” Foster said. “Mr. Doyle is not a prospective investor but a long-time friend of mine.” He smiled at Jansky.

Jansky smiled back. “What a relief,” he said, hoping he sounded confident.

“Did you think it was a test?”

"The possibility is always in the back of my mind. What convinced me was when he asked me my opinion on National Socialism. I would have expected you to cut him off and say the question was not appropriate."

Foster looked surprised for a second, then smiled. "I should keep that in mind the next time we run a test," he said.

"If you don't mind me asking, has anything like that ever happened, with a real client asking those kinds of questions?"

"No, but some have come close," Foster said. He looked to be pondering whether he should share details of these cases. "Well, I guess this is your formal initiation, Toma Jansky."

The word 'initiation' gave Jansky the creeps. He hoped it didn't show. "It is an honor," he said. He wished he'd have thought of something more clever to say.

"Don't sweat it, there's no initiation rite. I guess I can get some Scotch," Foster said. He walked over to a small cabinet underneath the painting of Chicago and pulled out a bottle and some shot glasses.

"Can you give me a symbolic portion," Jansky said. "I can't risk that in my system when I go through the checkpoint."

"Yeah, sure," Foster said. "Semko, Egorov" he yelled. "Get in here."

A few seconds later, the door opened, and Semko and Egorov came in. Foster looked to Semko. "He did very well," he said. "You were right about this one."

Foster poured Scotch into five glasses, four of which he filled completely. Evidently, Semko and Orlov were not as careful as him. "Doyle" had been silent; Jansky assumed he would not tell them his true identity.

They all drank their glasses. Jansky could tell that Foster and Doyle appreciated the taste while Semko and Egorov did not. He forced himself not to smile at this. After Doyle finished, he looked to Foster. "I must get going," he said.

"I owe you one," Foster said.

"It's been my pleasure," Doyle said. He shook the hands of Jansky, Semko, and Egorov once more and then turned around and walked toward the game room. He seemed to be in a hurry to get out. Perhaps he spoke cordially with Jansky as a favor to his friend but didn't especially like socializing with "subhumans."

"So," Foster said, turning to Jansky. "I'm sure you have many questions for me."

"Yes," said Jansky. "You said I did well in an atypical situation. What is the more typical situation?"

"Well, think about it from the perspective of the investor. As my friend said, most are heirs and heiresses. The rich want to buy products made for the rich. Sometimes the rich man's product really is better than the poor man's. An airplane is faster than a train. But a rich man's watch isn't any better than a poor man's watch. This is a rich man's investment opportunity. If someone

showed up here and told me he wanted to invest 1000 Weltmarks, I'd say, 'thanks, but no thanks, the paperwork for that would mean I'd have to charge you too high a fee for the return I could get you. I'd recommend a low-cost index fund,'" said Foster. He smiled. "Sometimes the poor man's product is better than the rich man's."

"Anyway," Foster continued, "I show them my office, proving that this is the rich man's way to invest. I show him the foosball tables and the meeting room; then I show them my private office." He stood up and walked toward the door to his office, followed by the three. He spoke excitedly, like a child who couldn't wait to show his friends his new toy. They walked into Foster's office, which was large and covered with photographs. "Here's my family, my wife, my grandparents, and so on," he said. "And here's me with the *Gauleiter*. But what I really want them to see are these," he said. He pointed to a photograph showing him at a restaurant with a white-haired, slightly overweight man in a dress shirt.

"That's the coach of the Thomas Wirth University football team. He's one of our investors." He pointed to another photograph. "This is Herbert Green, another of our investors. Name probably means nothing to you, but in my milieu of TWU graduates, he and his family name are enormously prestigious. You see, our clients read the paper. They know that these investment firms occasionally go *plop*," he said, making the motion with his hands. "Sometimes it's found we scam the investors, other times that we engage in illegal market manipulation, blackmail, stuff like that. If that happens, it won't be the end of the world for our investors. Nobody has all their money invested with us; most have around 20%. Sucks to lose 20% of your money, but when you've got 10 million, it really ain't so bad. Worse would be the taunting at the golf course. 'Hey, didn't you invest in that Ponzi scheme? Sorry to hear about that, dude.' With us, they know that if that does happen to them, lots of people in addition to them, Herbert Green, the couch of the TWU football team, they'll be scandalized as well."

"If that's not enough," Foster says. "I show them these." He picked up a large green ringed binder with a books-worth of paper. He handed it to Jansky. Jansky opened it up and saw that the first page was an analysis by Alya Semko, entitled "Seimens Law in Historical Perspective." "I know what they're thinking," Foster continued. "My friend Dylan Foster, he's a great guy to go golf with, but do I really want him managing my money? For that, I want an economist. Hell, I want a *nerd*. So they see this. They ask me who's this Alya Semko person and I say she's Russian, one of our analysts. I tell them that we have many more of these, but until they invest, we can only share the ones in this folder. I say, take it with you; I'll email you the electronic version. So the guy goes to his cousin, who works as an economist. Or has a degree in economics. Something like that. And he tells the guy, 'yeah, this is the kind of stuff they do in universities.'"

"So the guy comes back. But now, he has a new concern. He read some

articles online about this EMH thing. So I lower my voice and ask him if he'll make me a promise. I'll tell him something and, regardless of whether he decides to invest with us, he'll keep it to himself. He says he will. So I tell him our strategy. How we manage to acquire inside information. Sometimes he says he wants to meet these Russians. So I bring you out."

"How many prospective clients invest?"

"About ten percent?"

Jansky was surprised.

"You thought it would be higher?"

"Yes."

"These people are my friends. Many are humoring me. Others are LARPing. They like the feeling of being courted. Even when they don't have the money to invest. But even failures can lead to success later on; as I say to people, 'alright, that's fine, but if you have friends looking for investment opportunities, you know where we are.'

"Doyle, or I suppose his name probably isn't Doyle, said that all the firms claim they hire Russians because Russians 'really know what's going on?' How true is that?"

Foster smiled. "For them, as for us, it would depend on the customer. If we get the sense that they don't want to hear anything ideologically incorrect, we say nothing about our Russians. If they hint at it, we say it. There's a common joke. You want to meet the American in charge or the Russian who knows what's going on? So yes, if you go to Bernhard-Smit and they get the sense that you want to hear it, that's what they'll say. Though we can say it more credibly. Bernhard-Smit was founded back in 2003 and they put that date on everything possible. Everyone knows that if you're a talented American who just got out of Thomas Wirth, that's where you go. And people usually have nothing but good things to say about this group in public, as they want to be seen as supporting and not opposing those high in status. But there's a little voice in the back of their head that says, 'if you go with Bernhard-Smit, you'll just be buying yachts for these elites, while the guys who really know tech are the Russians, who are in any case much cheaper.' They know there are Russian-owned firms they could theoretically invest with, but doing so is just not done. We provide the way to do so."

Foster paused and had a contemplating look on his face. "Of course, this causes some problems for me. People won't invite me to their cocktail parties."

"The little Hitlers," said Egorov.

"Yes," Foster said. "It's not like they suspect I'm doing anything illegal or immoral, just a bit dirty, unbecoming of my class. And I used to sneer at it more, and people remember."

"Sneer at what?" asked Jansky.

"Nazism," said Foster, as if the answer was obvious. "And it wasn't just the little Hitlers, but a second, larger group of 'moderates.' These people

don't go out of their way to attend rallies. If forced to attend a two-hour lecture on the perfidy of the Allies and the Judeo-Bolshevik menace, they won't like it any more than I do. But if I sneer at it, they turn and sneer at me and call me the 'ideologue' concerned with things that 'don't matter.' I'm the ideologue, not the people that forced us to listen to their rant."

Jansky was stunned, though he didn't see why he should have been. Suddenly Foster looked perturbed. "Are you comfortable with this conversation?"

"Yes," Jansky said uneasily. "A bit stunning, but I'd like to hear more."

Foster smiled. "My parents were Nazis, you know. Not in an ideological way, mind you. In Kansas many still keep little American flags buried under piles of hay in barns. To my parents, it was simple: the American flag was low-class, the Nazi flag was high-class, that was all there was to it. I got a bit more 'political education' in school. I guess I was a Nazi, too, but a sheltered one. We still had black people in those days; the last batch was deported to the Reich in '55, I think. But they were in the South and East. There were none in Kansas. And, of course, there were no Russians. So I swallowed whole the Nazi view of the 'subhumans,' there was nothing in front of me to contradict it."

"At age eighteen, I came here, got off the train, and made my way to my dorm at Thomas Wirth. I expected to see the Russians, a bunch of stupid day laborers barely able to understand German, struggling in the sun, closely monitored under the whip hand of the American overseers. Instead, I found them working behind the counter, you smile at them and they smile right back at you, speaking perfect German. I went to Vanbar Street and I saw the bizarre spectacle. An American in a business suit speaking to a Russian in a business suit, OST badge at all, as if they are complete equals. These people would see Russian doctors if it wasn't prohibited by law, I thought. After absorbing this, I expected to go to school and encounter a great deal of 'political education' that would try to tell me I should not see what's clearly in front of my face. To get me to believe Russians were all stupid or violent. But I didn't find it. Finally, I got to third year, a one-semester class called 'racial theory.' Others had told me it wasn't what I would have thought, just a bunch of factual information about genetics and statistics. One day the professor asked rhetorically, are the Russians less intelligent than Western Europeans? As far as we know, they aren't, he said. He said it as if he was talking about the spin state of the Boron atom. The contradiction between the science of intelligence and how on the TV all Russians are borderline retarded didn't seem to occur to him."

"Do you think it is a loyalty test? That by remaining silent in the face of this propaganda that everyone knows is false, you signal your loyalty to the system?" asked Jansky.

"Yes, there's certainly some of that. But it's also the case that these *media people*, they don't see truth the way we do. Growing up in Kansas, the norm

was that you tell the truth. And if you lie, you try to convince people you are telling the truth. You put a lot of effort into fooling them into thinking you're an honest person. These media people, and I've met many, don't really think that way. They have this phrase for it, the 'higher truth.' It comes down to them in the 'style guide,' their encyclopedia of topics, what they are allowed to mention and how they are allowed to describe it. The idea that they should describe reality as it is rather than what it says in their style guide does not occur to them, even if they call it 'news.'"

"What about the ordinary Americans who grew up here? Do they see anything incongruous about the difference between TV and reality?" asked Jansky.

"Not really. To them, TV is just art, doesn't have to be true. But they are more supportive of Nazism here than we were in Kansas, that's for sure. It's funny, in a way. National socialism was never meant as a universalist movement. It was always purely German. It was us, and the Chinese and the Mexicans, who took the initiative in making it into one. Who went up to the Germans and said, 'you guys have got it right. Wouldn't it be grand if you could teach us how to hold rallies and organize the party and do the whole Hitler Youth thing?'"

"It's a shame we lost the war," Semko said.

"Yes," Foster said.

Jansky wondered which war they were referring to. Russia lost all three world wars, but Semko was probably referring to the second. That was the war most Russians associated with the destruction of their nation. Before he began *Prison of the Nation*, Jansky, like most of his contemporaries, thought of the Siberian rump as a sideshow, a refugee camp, a transit point to the ultimate fate of Russians in the ghettos. "Russia" was and had always been west of the Urals. Reading the diaries made him realize 'free Russia' was in all respects a real country. He wondered if there was some alternative timeline out there where it still existed and where Russians thought of their nation as inherently "Asian."

Foster, most likely, was thinking about the Third World War. America, after all, didn't lose any territory in WWII, so could dubiously call it a draw. He wondered if Foster was sincere in his condemnation of Nazism. If the clients believed the Russians were providing the firm's secret sauce, they might ask if the expensive middle-man could be cut out, perhaps in favor of an 'average Joe' willing to be the firm's American face for far less money. Was Foster just telling the Russians what they wanted to hear? The man is a professional storyteller, after all.

Just like Toma Jansky.

Chapter 8

As far as Toma Jansky knew, there were two pools in the North Kyiv Ghetto, one at Alexander Gulin club and the other at Alexander Filatov club. The latter, a point of pride among its members, was larger. On Saturday, the pool could be used by any member under age sixteen. For the rest of the week, its use was restricted to club members who bought the “gold plan.” The expense was considerable, even for Jansky, but was more than balanced by the raise Foster had given him last December. Foster didn’t know it, but part of the deal was that Jansky would help Maslak’s “campaign for the Presidency.” The gold plan, Maslak had said, was worth it.

The pool complex was extensive, covering two stories. It had one large pool, a smaller ‘kiddie pool’ for children, a hot tub, and a water slide feeding into a tiny pool. The ceiling was covered with a painting of the Altai mountains. If Jansky turned his plastic white beach chair around, he would see a massive panorama of Red Square as it looked like in 1914. To his right were the windows that let in natural light. Directly in front of him, across from the pool, were the twelve small “picnic rooms.” Six were on the lower floor; six more could be accessed by walking up the metal staircase in the corner of the room. The walls and doors were made of glass, and he could see inside the rooms, which contained young couples, families, and a group of four elderly women, all looking happy. For those condemned to live in the ghettos, this was the closest thing they had to a place to picnic. Two of the rooms were empty, one of them reserved for Jansky. It was there that he was to meet with Alik Yumatov, a member of the Pillar Council.

It had been three years since Jansky joined the Glanzia Forum, two years since he had joined the time capsule project, and one year since he learned of the feud between Linov and Maslak. He was a part of Maslak’s conspiracy and a double agent for Linov, but he had done and reported little. He had written Linov several times requesting a meeting with Taras Linov, always receiving no response. If he was misjudging Taras Linov, it was the father’s fault. Jansky had turned thirty and Nora was now three months pregnant with their third child. Lida had mellowed out of her “terrible fours” stage and was showing herself to be quite intelligent, though it would be several years before IQ tests could be considered substantially predictive. He continued to work on *Prison of the Nation*. He told Nora about the potential for a succession dispute in the future but made the rivalry between Linov and Maslak seem less grave than it was. It was a happy life, at times almost boring. But now, life was to take a new and exciting turn. He was shirtless in a swimsuit, physically tired from previous swimming, but he felt very much alive. The fact that he was to have an important meeting with a member of the elite while shirtless in a swimsuit would not surprise anyone. Many important deals in business and governance were negotiated in the clubs. Jansky was glad Maslak arranged the meeting there. If he needed to walk back later what he planned to say, it would be easier to do so with “that thing I said while half-naked in the country club after a beer or two” than with “that thing I said in my office.”

And also, his office was tiny and unimpressive.

Who was Alik Yumatov? From Maslak and the man's *Koppeln* page, he was the stereotypical aristocrat. Son of a councilman, his work history consisted entirely of fundraising for the public school system, jobs Jansky assumed he took for a five Weltmark salary. Maslak had quipped that they should all be glad such jobs existed, as otherwise, the incompetents would get positions where they could do real damage. But Yumatov was, according to Maslak, "open-minded." That was as much as Maslak would say, for he resisted Jansky's request for a list of councilmen detailing who was a Linov loyalist and who wasn't. "We cannot think in terms of one faction on the council defeating another, but of the council making a unified decision," Maslak had said. A less charitable interpretation was that Maslak did not want to share every important bit of knowledge he had lest Jansky decide to either go over to Linov or depose him in favor of someone other than Maslak.

As the clock was almost exactly 8 p.m., Alik Yumatov arrived. Jansky had met him once at a formal dinner with Maslak, where they had only exchanged a few words. This would be their first in-depth conversation. Yumatov was forty-one years old, partially bald, with blond hair, brown eyes, and a broad face. He was wearing a dark green swimsuit and while he wasn't as muscular as a bodybuilder he was surprisingly so for a councilman. He didn't seem to recognize Jansky, walking to the reserved 'picnic room.' Jansky stood up and followed him. He was surprised Yumatov had come alone.

Jansky met Yumatov in the room and they shook hands, with Yumatov seeming to recognize him then. Jansky considered asking if he'd like to order some food or beer. There was a white button in the picnic rooms one could push to summon a waiter. But Jansky was worried that Yumatov, who did not really know Jansky, would want to get right to the point with the option to leave immediately if he wasn't impressed.

"So," Jansky said. "How much did Maslak tell you about my little hypothesis?"

"Maslak said you believe the Nazis will, in a matter of weeks, extend the productivization mandate to all subhumans."

Jansky was surprised as he had thought Maslak would have been more cryptic. "Yes," Jansky said.

"Why?"

Yumatov's tone of voice was that of a businessman negotiating a routine business deal, and Jansky thought he was right to be skeptical. But if he was right, he would be proven so in a few weeks. "It comes from looking at yields of long-term bonds," Jansky said. "The Nazi government sells us bonds with differing maturity dates. One-year, two-year, ten-year, and so on. Now, all else being equal, one would rather have the one-year bond. You get your money back faster that way. So the offer on the ten-year bond is larger, but not dramatically so. Of course, all else is not equal. Another reason you buy

or sell a ten-year bond is to lock in the interest rate. If you expect interest rates to go down over time, you buy now. If you expect them to go up, you sell now.”

“So you observe lots of selling?”

“Yes. And, here is the vital aspect, people are only selling long-term bonds. If people were selling all bonds, you might think this is because people are selling to buy stocks or real estate or because they expect more inflation. But if you observe a bias toward the long-term bonds, it’s something else entirely. The most logical explanation is that people expect interest rates to rise.”

“And how is this connected with the productivization mandate?”

“Currently, subhumans average 1.7 children per woman. If that number were to rise to 3, the money to pay for their upbringing must come from somewhere. Already they set taxes so high that the working-class subhumans are at subsistence levels. Can they cope with three children per woman? Maybe not. Or maybe they can but only at the cost of malnutrition that would reduce the children’s future productivity and thus the Reich’s revenues. Regardless, the Nazis should be expected to reduce the taxes on the working class subhumans.”

“Couldn’t they reduce it for the working classes and raise it for us?”

“They could do that. But our taxes, too, are already at a level where they believe that raising rates any more would harm our incentive to work that they’d get less revenue over time.”

“So what do they do?”

“Make up the difference with more government borrowing.”

“And how would that increase interest rates?”

Yumatov was continuing to speak in an ordinary tone of voice as if this was an ordinary conversation. Jansky suppressed the urge to laugh at the man’s ignorance of economics. If the government borrowed more money, the price it would have to offer would go up; it was simple supply and demand. But he wouldn’t phrase it like that. “There’s a well-known correlation between increased government borrowing and higher interest rates.”

“Alright,” Yumatov said. “But how much will this tax reduction matter as far as leading to more borrowing and higher interest rates? Raising a ‘subhuman’ isn’t that expensive.”

“There are 1 billion of us. Quantity has a quality of its own.”

“I suppose,” Yumatov said. “Is there anything else that might raise interest rates?”

“This is the most logical explanation,” Jansky said. In truth, there were many reasons interest rates might increase or decrease. Some economists argue for a higher rate of inflation, which alone would do it. But if the Nazis wanted more inflation, they’d get it immediately, not in ten years. But an extension of the productivization mandate, if it resembled July 11, would only apply to the youngest. It wouldn’t apply to Jansky’s generation. The

immediate effect would be minimal. But Yumatov didn't understand economics jargon, and Jansky didn't want to plant doubts in his mind.

"You sure this isn't a fluke?"

"I've observed this for the past two weeks. I am sure now that it is not a fluke."

"Why isn't this on the financial channels?"

"Government doesn't want us speculating on their policies. The final decision hasn't been made yet, but we assume insiders in the Reich are pretty sure it will be, thus the movement in the market."

"So shouldn't you be concerned about the Kripo sending you to a KZ for telling people about this?"

"I'm always a little worried about the Kripo sending me to a KZ. Any Russian should be. That's why I'm not screaming this from the rooftops and why I'd prefer you to only tell it to people privately, as I'm doing here. Remember all the people who claimed they predicted July 11? None of them got arrested. The Nazis know that up in the Ford boardroom, they talk about future Nazi policy changes and how they might affect their profits. So long as it's private and discreet, they let it go on."

"So what should we do, financially, with this information?"

"Well," Jansky said, "if you have any long-term bonds, I would recommend selling them now."

"All my money is in the stock market."

"Then I have no financial advice for you."

Yumatov looked surprised. "You aren't going to make me an offer, take my money and invest it so that I can make money off this?"

"No."

"Don't you work for a hedge fund?"

"It's not technically a hedge fund, but it operates on a similar principle," he said untruthfully.

"So what's it doing with this information?"

"We've told our clients that interest rates may rise in the future. Shown them the yield curve data, which is all public, and have not shared any speculations on why. They can read between the lines to see that it must be due to changing Nazi policy. If we thought it was due to an upcoming technological breakthrough, we'd say so."

"You aren't trading on some kind of derivative to make money off this thing?"

"No, we aren't that kind of company. We do sure deals, and this isn't it. It is still possible that there are other reasons for this. It's also possible the information is already fully reflected in the price."

"Then why are we here," Yumatov said.

"I thought you'd want to know this," Jansky said, a bit confused. "This will be vitally important to the future history of our people."

"You sure you aren't gonna say, 'actually, if you really want to make

money, here's how?" The classic salesman tactic of making the customer beg for it?"

"No," Jansky said. "If you really want to bet money, I can send you instructions on how to execute the trades yourself, but I'm not going to do it for you or charge any money for it."

Yumatov smiled. "You surprised me, Jansky," he said. "I thought for sure you'd offer to take my money. I'm only here because I owe a favor to Yuri Maslak."

"I'm glad I exceeded your expectations."

"Yuri Maslak's your friend too, I assume?"

"Yes."

"So what do you think of him?"

Jansky smiled. "Very smart, very insightful, always telling me things about the pillar, the governing system, that I am surprised to learn."

"Do you think we are a bunch of mediocrities, my class of people?"

"No, I don't," Jansky said. "I've observed that the loudest of the critics are mediocrities themselves. The aristocrats have trained for their positions since birth; the hotheads haven't."

"So you don't share Maslak's contempt for us?"

Jansky smiled. "Maslak has never denied his class origin. He sometimes has an everyman's persona, but he's never pretended to be anything other than a councilman's son, never claimed his was a rags-to-riches story."

"Yes," Yumatov said. "He thinks highly of *himself*. But he hates the rest of us."

"I've never seen that side of his personality," Jansky said firmly. "He has contempt for a select few people, that is all."

"I'm a bit worn out of this saying things cryptically thing," Yumatov said.

"He doesn't have a high opinion of Anton Linov and especially his son, Taras," Jansky said.

Yumatov looked at Jansky skeptically for about ten seconds. "So you know about this whole succession dispute idiocy?"

"Yes."

Yumatov paused, unsure of what to say. "Why not give the boy a chance? If he doesn't work out, seven of us can come together and depose him."

Jansky thought about pointing out how the usage of the term 'boy' was revealing. Taras Linov was older than Jansky was, after all. Would Yumatov call Jansky a 'boy?' But he decided against it. "What if Taras the hothead decides he'll defy the Kripo? Kripo says to arrest someone; he orders the ghetto police not to. He could trigger a raid. You think the normal ones are bad? Imagine if they had an actual pretext."

Yumatov looked down and sighed with a sad puppy look. But Jansky had been in enough arguments to know that "winning" the argument often does the opposite of changing the opponent's mind. They feel wounded and cling to their original view all the more fervently. "Well, Yuri Maslak doesn't

inspire confidence either,” Yumatov said. “I know the man’s your friend. He’s my friend too. But come on, tell me his personality doesn’t scream, ‘I have skeletons in my closet.’”

Maslak *did* have skeletons in his closet, Jansky knew. But there was something more in Yumatov’s dislike, he thought. Maslak had told him that Yumatov was “one of those nice man nobles who thinks of me as a bully.” Maslak spoke as if he couldn’t understand Yumatov’s point of view and Jansky pretended that he, too, was mystified by it. But he thought he did understand it. Yumatov is the right kind of aristocrat. Maslak isn’t. Yumatov is usually the most important person in the room. If there is a decision to be made, he is the one to make it. But he has *noblesse oblige*, makes sure all the lesser people have the chance to express their opinion before he makes the decision. Maslak, in contrast, is eager to dominate every conversation, having no time for the shy people. Yumatov stands in the background, waiting to be “called” to the position that is his by birthright. Maslak has the politician’s will-to-power, eager to do everything possible to get to the center as quickly as he can. But couldn’t Yumatov see that Maslak’s personal boorishness cannot possibly compare to the violent behavior of Taras Linov?

“I don’t think Yuri Maslak has any skeletons in his closet,” Jansky said, hoping he sounded confident. “And if he does, he is smart enough to hide them. Taras Linov, not so much.”

“Suppose we grant, and I am not granting you that, but suppose we grant that Taras Linov is unacceptable as a future President. Would you support a compromise candidate?”

“Yes, of course, and I’m sure Maslak would as well,” Jansky said. It was a bald-faced lie.

“What if Maslak didn’t?”

Jansky knew he had to think quickly. Maslak might have asked Yumatov to pretend to have an equivocal attitude to test Jansky’s loyalty. “I would support what’s best for the ghetto. If that leads me into a conflict with my friend Yuri Maslak then so be it. I have not promised unconditional loyalty to Maslak, nor has he ever asked me to do so.”

“So that’s what this is really about,” Yumatov said, a slight hint of triumph in his voice. “If the Nazis extend the productivization mandate and you’ve successfully predicted it, people will start listening to your opinions?”

As they should, Jansky thought. After all, he wasn’t an aristocrat people listened to because of his parentage. He had to earn it. But he responded with a simple “yes.”

“Good to know,” Yumatov said. He paused and had a contemplating look. “He’s not entirely wrong, Yuri Maslak,” Yumatov said. “All of us go to the Sungenlar every two months. We put on our badges, walk to the top floor, sit down, and then the deputy Kripo captain asks if the council has confidence in the leadership of Anton Linov. We say yes, and are dismissed. The entire process lasts a few minutes, usually. We take off the badges and leave. Apart

from that, we never leave the ghetto. We aristocrats live in this bubble,” he said as he turned to stare out at the pool. He turned back to Jansky. “This environment is congenial enough. Our businesses, our families, and our ‘country clubs’ are inside. We forget the nature of the system we live under.” Yumatov paused, considering his words. “But about Taras Linov, the question is, what happens next, if we shove him aside in favor of Maslak? Maslak is five years younger than Anton Linov. When he must retire, who succeeds him?”

The likely successor, Jansky believed, was Koloda Sorokin. But he didn’t know if Yumatov liked, didn’t like, or hadn’t heard of the man. “Whoever the council decides to elect.”

“That’s a tautology, Mr. Jansky. I am asking the question, *who* should it elect? One of Maslak’s kids? Yourself?”

“I really doubt the council would be willing to elect me, though I would accept the position if I were honored in such a way.”

Yumatov smiled. “I’d advise you, if you want a successful career in ‘politics,’ to save the modesty act. It’s obvious you want at least a high political office, if not the Presidency. Nothing wrong with that. But people will feel disrespected if you aren’t upfront about it.”

Jansky smiled, unsure of how to respond. It sounded like it could be good advice. “I am sorry,” he said, unsure what exactly he was sorry for. “My point was not to portray myself as excessively modest. I have fantasized about being President since I was a small child; I admit that. If Maslak becomes President, I hope to be a trusted advisor to him. The point I am trying to make is that with Maslak, you are not signing up for a dynasty. There will be those angling to succeed Yuri Maslak, surely, but you do not need to commit to supporting anyone now, the way Anton Linov demands you support the son, grandson, great-grandson, and so on.”

“So we must do this again?” he asked. He looked and sounded honestly pained.

Jansky could have said that a job where one is confronted with a difficult decision every five years is hardly the worst a Russian could have. Try working in the Norilsk nickel mines. But Jansky did understand his complaint. Everyone fantasizes about being able to make the right decisions. Then they get to the top and realize their main concern is “how can I avoid blame if something goes wrong?” The easiest way is to find some way to pass the buck onto someone else. This was why the first-tier firms didn’t mind the ERB as much as one might think. Decisions about who they can hire and how much they can spend on advertising are made for them, and if they’re the wrong decisions, well, at least their competitors are hobbled as well. Jansky thought about responding with some variation of ‘I understand.’ But that would project weakness, he worried. He decided to make his case forcefully. “You can look at it through the lens of ‘I’ll *have* to make this decision.’ You can also look at it through the lens of ‘I’ll *get* to make this decision.’”

“The way the subject pillarmen get to make their decisions?”

Jansky smiled. “I wish we didn’t refer to our pillars and their pillars by the same name. The institutions couldn’t be more different.”

Yumatov looked at him skeptically. “Do you think ours should be more like theirs?”

There were many ways the two institutions differed. Subject pillars were worldwide institutions headquartered in Berlin. Subhuman pillars were specific to one ghetto. The Nazis put a great deal of effort into spying on the subject pillars, didn’t much care about the subhuman pillars. The subject pillars were led by men, while women could be subhuman pillar leaders, though it was rare. But perhaps the most important difference, which caused the most fear in Yumatov, concerned their governance. Subject pillars had Presidents restricted to six-year terms along with “congresses” of several hundred men restricted to fifteen-year terms. The Nazis put the thumb on the scale to assure that the “congressmen” included enough of certain groups. Ten seats might be reserved for members of the education bureaucracy, five for leading scientists, forty for leading businessmen, and so on. For men like Yumatov, such a system for the ghettos, whether imposed by the Nazis or chosen by Russians themselves, was a perennial terror. Some ghettos do mimic features of the subject pillar system, most notably Munich, where all Presidents have voluntarily resigned after six years in office.

Jansky pondered how he should respond. He could say no, he doesn’t want that system, but feared sounding unconvincing. He could say that nobody knows much about the subject pillar system, so it’s silly to worry about people demanding a variation of it for the ghettos. But that, too, would not sound convincing. People’s misconceptions about the subject pillars made them look more rather than less attractive. “I understand your fear. You believe that this could be opening a Pandora’s box. But you know what looks significantly more dangerous? Putting Taras Linov in the office of Presidency. The man is a walking, breathing constitutional crisis.”

“If we do this, depose Linov in favor of Maslak, I can guarantee you it won’t be a unanimous decision. Three, four, or five of them will be looking to throw us out.”

Jansky pondered what he should say. Yumatov was his elder in both age and status, and he was on the council. Jansky wasn’t. He would have to make his point indirectly. “That is something to worry about. But consider that this has happened in other ghettos, and in ours, and the President or his son or son-in-law rarely climbs back into power.”

“Usachyov was so far back I don’t think you can draw any conclusions from what happened.”

Vladimir Usachyov was one of the ghetto’s early Presidents. According to the ghetto’s “oral history,” he planned to be succeeded by his son Joseph. But, two years before the father reached retirement age, Joseph was shot by a French soldier under unclear circumstances. Vladimir Usachyov had no other

children, nor any siblings or nephews who had survived the war. His only family members were his widowed daughter-in-law Inna and her three young children, and he decided she would succeed him. Due to her sex and lack of experience, she was not acceptable to the majority of the council, who chose Boris Likhachyov instead. Likhachyov became the founder of the Linov dynasty, renamed when the Nazis forced Russians to “rationalize” their surnames. Inna Usachyov gathered a retinue of supporters and waited in vain for the council to recognize their mistake and invite her family back. Her loyalists on the council, with skin in the game and positions to lose, gradually forgot about her. According to one variation of the story, the Usachyov “court” still exists, waiting for its restoration. This always seemed laughable to Jansky, and Maslak laughed when he was asked about it.

“I agree that you should be wary of drawing conclusions from Usachyov. But what of Carov in Dortmund?” Jansky asked.

“Too far away,” Yumatov said. “I know many people think of us aristocrats as a worldwide clique, but we aren’t. I know about Dortmund’s Russian ghetto about as much as I know about Dortmund’s black or Polish ghetto.”

Jansky knew enough to know that Dortmund didn’t have a Polish ghetto, but he was not going to correct Yumatov. “The culture may be different,” Jansky said. “But the incentive structure is the same. When we look at all these different ghettos, and we should include the Black and Polish ghettos in this, we should reason our situation is common. That we are the rule rather than the exception.” Jansky was trying to think up a way to explain the Copernican principle without “talking down” to the man who had probably never heard of it.

“If you don’t mind, I’d like to discuss another subject,” Yumatov said.

Jansky was surprised but smiled and responded with “alright.”

“How about yourself,” Yumatov said.

Jansky was pleased with the change in topic and gave the seventy-five percent true account of his life and how he came to become a friend of Yuri Maslak. He got the impression that Yumatov was a man who, when push came to shove, would side with Anton Linov. Yet he wanted to “do his job,” which included entertaining the possibility of opposing him. Did Yumatov believe his story about the productivization mandate? Probably not. But what he thought then would not matter. Jansky would either be proven right or proven wrong.

After they finished talking, Yumatov decided to remain and use the pool, while Jansky decided to go home. He returned to the locker room and changed into pants and a plain red t-shirt, pierced by the cold. He then walked out and past the exercise machines and the basketball courts. He went down the stairwell, through the “arcade,” and finally through the “restaurant hall,” where a dozen chains sold food at inflated prices. One might think A.F. Club would be more efficient as four separate clubs located in different places in the

ghetto, but that would sacrifice perhaps the club's main appeal, the *people*. They were rich and they were happy; those who looked grouchy were few and far between. He walked through the exit door and felt the slightly cold air on his skin. He got out his sweater and began the walk back to his apartment, about six blocks to the south.

Jansky arrived and opened his door to find Nora sitting on the couch and watching TV. The girls were in their room, watching TV on the small, cube-shaped older television. Nora was the first person he told of his theory about the productivization mandate. She considered herself unqualified to comment on the economics but supported his plan to tell everyone. He was relieved that she had no fear of the Kripo.

"How'd it go?" she asked.

"I think he liked me. Didn't believe me, but no matter. I'll be proven right or wrong in a short while."

"What was he like?"

"Stereotypically aristocratic. Not smart, not dumb, average intelligence. Not loud, didn't brag a lot, which was nice. He wanted to know about me, my life, my ideas."

"That's good," she said.

"Yes," he said. "We also talked about the 'succession dispute.'"

"What'd he think?"

"Yumatov didn't much like Maslak, unfortunately," he said.

"That's too bad," Nora said. "But he did like you?"

"Yes," he said, smiling. "Too bad I'm not in the running."

Nora smiled.

"Someone, I can't remember who, said that every story can be summed up as 'and then a stranger came to town.' I'm the stranger. A.F. Club is the town. Or perhaps it's A.G. Club. The clubs, as a whole, maybe."

"And the question now is...."

"How does the town react?"

Chapter 9

The theatre room in Maslak's penthouse could seat twenty-seven people. Instead of individual seats, there were three semicircles with three black couches that could seat three people each, ascending in steps from the front to the back. The carpet, ceiling, and walls were light gray. The room was windowless and could be made entirely dark but was presently well-lit by the tiny lights that dotted the ceiling, as if in a real theatre. The massive flat-screen television was set to channel three, playing images of the Volkshalle in Berlin, narrated by some professional architect. Nobody was paying attention to the screen; rather, the attention was toward Yuri Maslak, sitting with his wife and two youngest children on the backmost central couch. On the couch next to him was the man of the hour, Toma Jansky, with his pregnant wife and

their children.

The news that the productivization mandate had been extended had gone out that mourning. Maslak knew that while everyone loved to party in his penthouse, people wanted to spend this historic day with their families. So he told his inner circle to bring them along. Koloda Sorokin, Ivan Vinov, and their wives and children were there, as were Gena Orlyk, Pavel Kolov, and the Semko family. Maxim Semko had brought his girlfriend and her parents, who were visibly awed by the magnificence of it all. Lara Vinov, Ivan's wife, had a perhaps more equivocal reaction. She rarely attended Maslak's parties, telling her husband that the Glanzia Forum members were not "her kind of people." But she did look happy. There were others Jansky did not recognize, perhaps friends of Maslak's wife or children. In total, there were more people than seats in Maslak's theatre, so the party trailed out into the adjoining rooms. Maslak had given his servants the day off and looked a bit uneasy with all the small children running around unsupervised. Nora would certainly not be taking any chances with Lida, holding the girl firmly in her lap. As with all of Maslak's parties, most were dressed casually, though some, coming directly from the office or not knowing the dress code, were wearing formal clothes.

It had been 9:49 AM that mourning when Toma Jansky learned what had happened. He was writing *Prison of the Nation*, working on a chapter about the experiences of POWs, when Egorov burst in on him and told him he was right about everything. The *Reichsnews* website carried a brief story that was scarce on details. Subhuman women born in 2077 and up would be required to bear at least three children. Exemptions for infertility, widowhood, spousal abandonment, and "eugenic criteria" would be granted. No elaboration of what was meant by these terms was provided. Most importantly, it stated that head taxes would be reduced for people in this age group and that the reduction in government revenue would be made up by borrowing.

Litzer had not made an official statement, but it was known that he was to give a speech to the Volkshalle that evening. A *Gauleiter* would set a definite time, but the *Führer* could begin his speech when he felt like beginning his speech. Jansky assumed that the "guidelines" for how reporters should approach the subject had not yet gone out. Rather than risk saying things that would soon become ideologically incorrect, the producers decided to discuss the "safe" topic of architecture while they waited for the *Führer* to speak. Hitler conceived of the Volkshalle in 1925, the TV said, but construction did not begin until 1993. It could seat 180,000 people. Left unsaid by the television was the fact that the building was only filled to capacity once a year for the Nazi party congress. It was certainly possible to fill it regularly. Most subject pillars had their headquarters in Berlin, and the ambassador to Berlin was the first or second most powerful office in every foreign state. But though the Nazis wanted all these men in a single city where they could be easily watched, the idea of putting them all in a single building made them queasy.

That could risk turning into “internationalist parliamentarianism.” The only form of international cooperation the Nazis wanted consisted of them giving orders, others groveling and asking for slight modifications here and there, and then signing a supposedly voluntary “multilateral” treaty.

As far as the markets went, the obvious winner was the Weltbank’s “High-End Ghetto Real Estate Index Fund.” It had been going up over the past three weeks but was unaffected that day, proving that the information had been widely known and already integrated into the market before the official announcement. The financial journalist channels could not say this, of course, but any economically literate person could figure it out for themselves. Jansky was one among thousands who knew what would happen. But that he predicted it makes him the smartest man in *this* room, he thought, and that was what mattered.

He was struck by how little sadness he heard in the calls people made to congratulate him for the prediction. Though he supposed it shouldn’t surprise him. All his friends were in the class that was already covered by the existing productivization mandate. What about him and his children? He did want them to bear at least three children; he also wanted them to have the freedom not to do so. They had a little bit of freedom in the era of July 11. They could have simply paid the taxes, lived in relative poverty, and remained childless. In the age of what he presumed would be called May 12, this option would be closed to them. But he never would have expected any to take it up. There was a sense in which it was irrational for him to waste brainpower deciding whether he was sad or happy about what had happened. Nazi policy did not take his opinions into account.

What about the workers? According to Koloda Sorokin, their reaction was muted. They feel a sense that their fundamental rights were violated, sure, but they fully expect that kind of thing, and some look forward to the reduction in taxes. Jansky wasn’t sure how Sorokin knew this and didn’t ask out of fear that he was BSing and that pointing this out would humiliate him. But it did make sense. A not inconsiderable proportion of the workers believed in the myth of impending technological unemployment, that the Nazis would “exterminate them as Jews” when mechanization made them no longer necessary. The extension of the mandate, he presumed, falsified this belief. Though the continual rise in wages should have falsified it already, so perhaps they will cling to it regardless.

Jansky decided to go and converse with Maxim Semko, who was standing by the rightmost front couch and talking to his girlfriend and her parents. Maxim Semko and Yulia Makarov had met at their private high school and had a rocky, on-again-off-again relationship. Yulia Makarov was, like her boyfriend, second-generation new money. She was half Asian and not particularly pretty. Her mother was Mongolian, born in the Moscow Ghetto, where a community of Mongols was assimilating into Russiandom. Her father looked typically Slavic, with brown hair and gray eyes. Celebration and

mourning are both excuses to drink and Maxim Semko, his girlfriend, and their parents all had a drink in hand. Alisa looked visibly drunk, smiling and looking side to side. As for Jansky, he figured he had done enough drinking on May Day, the one Nazi holiday Russians celebrated without hesitation.

"Hello," Jansky said, extending his hand toward the parents. "You must be Yulia's parents. I'm Toma Jansky, Maxim's co-worker."

The father looked surprised, shaking Jansky's hand. "Hello," he said. "I'm Kliment Makarov. This is my wife, Alisa. So you really did predict this thing?" he asked.

"Yes."

Kliment turned toward his daughter.

"He really did," she said. "Maxim told me last weekend, but I didn't believe it."

Jansky smiled. "Maxim was one of the first people I told when I did the calculations. I was sure there must be some flaw in my logic. He said, 'it looks solid.'"

"You saw history unfolding before your eyes," Kliment Makarov said, turning to Semko. Makarov reached out for Maxim Semko and shook the man's hand, almost missing as he did so.

Alisa Makarov looked to Jansky, "So, you think they're gonna sell exceptions to the man, uh, mandate?" she asked in a drunken accent.

"It is a question I was wondering about myself," Jansky said. "After all, while nobody is exempt from July 11, it only applies to earned income. The very wealthy can sit back and live comfortably off of interest, dividends, and capital gains. It does make sense to sell exceptions as a kind of luxury good, but I presume they rejected it as it would be dysgenic. They call it 'productivization' rather than 'eugenics,' but they clearly think in eugenic terms."

"How can you be sure they won't announce it later?" Maxim asked.

"I'm sure they had the argument about it and decided not to sell exceptions. If they decided the other way, they'd say so now. Sure, they haven't defined exactly what "eugenic criteria" or "spousal abandonment" means. But we all know in a general sense what these phrases mean. It won't look like they're "walking back" when they elaborate."

As Kliment Makarov was about to speak, he was interrupted by Pavel Kolov. "Quiet everybody," Kolov said. "The speech is about to start."

The room instantly deadened and Jansky looked back to see Maslak playing with his phone. As he did so, the room darkened slightly. Jansky walked up to the back and resumed sitting next to his wife, who gave him Lida to hold.

The television played images of the men seated in the Volkshalle, all in brown Nazi uniforms, with red armbands on the left arm. All leading Germans owned such uniforms, even if they were technocrats who rarely wore them. The image changed to show foreign dignitaries in black business suits sitting

further back. The vast majority of the 180,000 seats in the hall would be empty, but the cameramen would be careful not to show it.

Finally, the picture shifted to the face and body of Hans Litzer, standing on the podium in front of a giant Nazi flag. He was dressed in a brown Nazi uniform, identical to those of the audience. Litzer was eighty-four years old but, like most of the Nazi gerontocracy, looked two decades younger due to hair dye and plastic surgery. He had green eyes, brown hair, and a long, Nordic face. He was the first Fuhrer with substantial ancestry from the “Germanizers,” his mother being Dutch.

“My volk,” he said, “I am speaking to you today about the recent change in our policy regarding the fertility of the subhumans. I know that in this, I have the support of the overwhelming majority of my Volk. I know that some are confused about the motivation for the policy change, and I hope this speech will address their concerns. National socialism has never been a movement based on unquestioning obedience. We have always encouraged our people to think critically. But just as we do this, we also maintain that we have no tolerance for those who knowingly and continually repeat falsehoods.”

“The biggest item of confusion concerns the effect of this policy change on government revenue. To allow the subhumans to have more children, we shall reduce the taxes of those cohorts subject to the new mandate. And here is where the know-it-alls, the spiritual Jews, will tell you that you will lose, that you will face higher taxes or a reduction in the level of government services. This, however, is simply wrong. We are not raising taxes and are not making any cutbacks on government spending. The shortfall will be made up by greater borrowing.”

“The spiritual Jews will then squawk about ‘crowding out.’ This is nonsense. This program is not crowding out investment. It is investment. It is investment in the future productive assets of subhumanity who shall work as slaves to our culture. The money that buyers of Reich bonds give to us will be paid back not by imagination but by the productivity of future subhumans, taxed by our Reich. If it acts to increase interest rates, it is in the same manner as the steam engine acted to increase interest rates, by increasing the productive potential of the future economy and thus giving investors a greater return. The steam engine, too, “crowded out” other investment opportunities, but the whole reason it did this was because it was a *better* investment opportunity. This program is much the same. It provides a return that is superior to the market rate of interest. The know-it-alls will then change tack, saying the market rate of interest being paid today is wrong, that they alone know all these productive investment opportunities the market is missing. Well, my spiritual Jewish friend, borrow, invest, and beat the market! Prove me wrong!”

“The pygmies have been going on and on about how the low interest rates are a passing phenomenon, how they will go up tomorrow. It has simply not

happened. Are we to believe the same people who've been wrong 20 years in a row will be right tomorrow? What nonsense!"

"Some will say that the new policy is at variance with the ideals of National socialism as expressed by our first Führer, Adolf Hitler. This is idiocy. Hitler acted to limit the fertility of the subhumans in the Reich because he was faced with an international enemy bent on the destruction of Germany. He could not risk having too many subhumans in the Reich when faced with this life or death struggle. Today is very different. National Socialist Germany faces no threat of any foreign war but lives in peace with all nations. The reason for this is simple, as Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler have freed the world from the source of trouble between the nations. I do not need to say the name!"

Litzner paused, and a second later, the audience began to bay. "The Jews! The Jews! The Jews," screamed the crowd. The chant continued for several minutes as the cameras shifted to the crowd. Both the uniformed Nazis and the non-Germans in business suits were baying identically. Jansky wondered if this needed to be choreographed or if everyone instinctively knew the script.

"Borrow and beat the market," Jansky sneered quietly to Nora. "As if anyone can just borrow at the same rate as the first-tier banks."

Yet, in that moment, Jansky realized he bore no hatred toward Hans Litzner, not really. He would kill the man if given the chance, yes. Set up depth charges in the Volkshalle, bring it down on all of them. He'd joyously imagine the crowd getting crushed by the enormous weight of the towering marble, the SS and party leaders and foreign lackeys. But for Hans Litzner he felt no hate. Hans Litzner was believed by most to be the driving force behind the shift in Nazi ideology from Malthusianism to Cornucopianism. He was the driving force behind July 11. He talked about interest rates and index funds and government borrowing 'crowding out' investment. Most Nazis didn't talk that way. Jansky could mimic this comic villain and that was a vital aspect in his rise to prominence.

After the crowd gradually calmed down, Litzner began speaking again. "We have made this policy reform for one reason and one reason only: the pursuit of economic growth. Some may mock this, say it is decadent and compare our Reich to the decadent empires of the past. What is decadence? Decadence is *laziness*. It is *selfishness*. It is *cowardice*. The mere fact of being wealthy does not make a society decadent. The goal of our movement since the very beginning has been for our volk to be rich and for Germany to be beautiful. The great progress we have made in the course of the past century and a half is no reason to stop. What would be decadent would be to declare that what we have is merely 'good enough,' that we should just sit back and relax and not bother with the hard work of economic rationalization, scientific and technical advances, and the rooting out of corruption at all levels of our party and state. We will continue the fight, both to achieve economic growth

and to improve the genetic quality of our volk. The know-it-alls will inevitably ask why we are sterilizing members of our volk who have genetic diseases while forcing the subhumans to produce children. Are not the subhumans inferior to us? I would ask these know-it-alls, would you like to trade places with the subhumans? If so, that can be arranged!"

The audience burst out into laughter. After some time, Litzer resumed. "The endless complaint from critics of our eugenics program is that people with genetic diseases do not 'deserve' to be sterilized for something they 'did not choose.' This is the wrong way to think about the issue. It is not whether you deserve to be sterilized. The question is whether a child of our volk deserves to be brought into the world stricken with a genetic disease we know how to prevent. We have no hatred for persons who suffer from genetic diseases. If they volunteer for sterilization, we honor their sacrifice for a better world. But we absolutely hate those who would inflict these maladies on our volk to satisfy some half-baked Jewish morality. We will not permit their subversion of our volk. We will act humanely but firmly against these subversives. There is not a single member of our volk who says, 'I hope my child grows up to be an alcoholic, to be chronically depressed, to have an IQ of 70.' Our volk will not lose anything when these maladies are eliminated. No one will ask for them back. They are not inevitable any more than smallpox was inevitable. We can eliminate them with modern science. That is the promise of eugenics. That is what the National Socialist German Workers Party will deliver. Seig Heil."

He raised his right hand over his head to receive the Nazi salute, signaling the end of his speech. The audience raised their hands and began to chant.

"Seig Heil!"

"Seig Heil!"

"Seig Heil!"

The TV screen went over the audience, all manically giving the Nazi salute. It was a short speech, much shorter than his speech on July 11, 2084, when he was younger and spryer. The Nazi ideology never had much respect for the wisdom of elders. Youthfulness and virile masculinity were always central to it. But the glorification of the Fuhrer would not allow him to resign for reasons of ill-health. All Fuhrers thus far have died at their posts. The solution to this conundrum was hair dye, plastic surgery, and, to the relief of the often captive audience, short speeches.

After a few minutes, the TV went back to the newscaster. "A brilliant speech by our great Fuhrer," the man said. He then launched into an outline of the Fuhrer's life story that everyone knew, probably to cover for the fact that he still did not know the party line regarding the mandate and so could say nothing about it. Maslak turned down the lights and reduced the TV's volume, after which people stood up and resumed conversing with others. Jansky went back to conversing with the parents of Yulia Makarov, who told a series of jokes about the real estate industry that Jansky forced himself to laugh at.

After finishing the conversation, he went looking for Ivan Vinov, who had left the theatre room after the speech.

After searching the house for a bit, he found Vinov with Gena Orlyk and Pavel Kolov in Maslak's private office. It was small by the standards of the penthouse but large by the standards of most offices, larger and posher than Maslak's Yamel Tower office. To Jansky's left was Yuri Maslak's desk, where his massive computer monitor was attached to a rolling mechanism that allowed one to push it to the side. Hanging on the wall behind the desk were photographs of Maslak with his children and various extended family members. To Jansky's right was a red couch that could seat two people. Above the couch was a large map of the *Gaue* of the Reich, with a sidebar listing how many Germans, Reich subjects, foreign citizens, and subhumans lived in each. In the back was a large bookshelf with titles mostly concerned with history and governance. Vinov sat at Maslak's desk, having pushed the monitor aside. Orlyk and Kolov sat on the plain red couch opposite it. Maslak had called the room his "man cave," where he went to get away from the wife and kids, maybe with one or two friends. Vinov, Orlov, and Kolov were using it for a similar purpose.

"Hey," Orlyk said, looking to Jansky. "We've been arguing here, and since you are the recognized expert, we wonder what you think."

Jansky sat down on the couch's arm and Kolov, sitting next to him, moved slightly. "Okay," he said. "What's the argument?"

"We're arguing about whether there will be a widespread problem with people trying to evade the new mandate," Vinov said.

"My case is simple," Orlyk began. "There are a great many people who don't want to have children, don't want to get married. Some don't even want to have sex. Now, for the working class, and for the middle class, these people do and will put up with it. Partly because to be single is a luxury. When you're poor, you're gonna be living on top of someone. They might as well be someone whose body you find attractive at times," he said.

The others laughed.

"But," Orlyk went on, "the rich can afford to indulge. Some of these people give orders to the ghetto police."

"The case I make," Vinov said, "is relatively simple. Childless single women are looked down on in certain parts of our culture, but that's about it. They can associate with one another and reinforce behavior that mainstream society pathologizes. Yes, some have an inherent desire to engage in those behaviors, so they decide to join that subculture. But when the risk of being childless and single goes from 'exchanging one set of friends for another' to 'exchanging one set of friends for another, and also running the risk of jail,' that's a whole nother matter. You probably won't join. And once that happens, the alternative subculture ceases to exist. You only have mainstream culture, where all your friends are marrying and having children. Part of you wants to join them and another part doesn't. Then a policeman shows up at

your door, explains you run the risk of jail and then a KZ if you don't get a ring and a baby and soon. You will kvetch about it, but you will do it."

"You are begging the question. The average woman will feel afraid of the police, yes. But the elite woman won't. The rank and file policeman is a tough guy of middle-class origin. But his commanders, the people who sign his paycheck, they are aristocratic wimps. They are entirely capable of ordering their men to be ruthless with the nobodies but will not do anything that will offend their party guests."

"If the risk is 'go to a KZ' or 'offend party guests,' I think I know which they will pick."

"I think you don't know them as well as I do," Orlyk said, pausing. Unlike Kolov, Vinov, and Jansky, he had grown up rich and had gone to a private school. He was also a happily unmarried single man and was at risk of overestimating the antinatalist sentiments of the elite class. "They are weak," Orlyk continued. "For them, the threat of the KZ is not 'real.' It's just a story they use to scare people but don't really believe in their heart of hearts, like the afterlife in the age of religion. To them, rules are for the little people."

"I just don't see them breaking rules; that's the thing."

"They don't need to break the rules because they are able to buy their way out of them. They will expect to do so with this one. If the Germans don't let them, well, we're all in major trouble because they aren't gonna go along. Some will know they are courting disaster collectively by their refusal to enforce the mandate. But for the individual in any given individual moment, the path of least resistance is to sit back, look the other way at violators. And then the Nazis will depose the council and select another, probably from some distant ghetto. Maybe the Donbas," he said, alluding to a particularly poor, polluted ghetto where one supposed the people and leadership were tougher.

"There are lots of rules that no Russian is exempt from. No Russian can go to Crimea and relax on the beach," Vinov said. "And you don't see the elites getting caught breaking this rule. When it happens, it's usually some idiot from a poor background."

"That's different," Orlyk said. "Swimming on the beach in Crimea is alien to elite culture. They have the pools at the clubs. The option to be childless if one wants to, in contrast, is something that they take for granted. Think about it this way. Why are we here?"

"Elaborate," Vinov replied.

Orlyk looked around at the relatively spacious office. "Why are we having this argument here and not in some worker's hovel imbued with the smell of human sweat?"

"We need incentives to create wealth that can be paid as taxes to the Nazis. The Laffer curve and all," Vinov said.

"In other words," Orlyk said, "we need to cooperate and get a better deal than the proles get, including making sure the proles pay their taxes. But suppose everyone had to live in a hovel, including the police. The Germans

would have a far more difficult time collecting taxes.”

“Those things are not comparable,” Vinov said. “You need an incentive to pay taxes. Most people don’t need an incentive to have three children. If you look at the survey evidence, most people want to have three or more children. They don’t do so because they can’t afford it or because they wait too long to settle on a partner,” he said. He paused for a second, then smiled. “Yes, I was part of that second group.”

Despite his smile, Jansky thought the tone of his voice betrayed a great deal of regret.

“In the coming decades,” Vinov continued, “this will be less of a problem. People will start the search for a spouse earlier because that will be the social convention. Most will feel like they lose little by ‘cooperating’ with the enforcement of the mandate. If they’re bothered morally, they will tell themselves the same thing they always do. ‘I’m just following orders. I have no choice.’”

“Survey evidence,” Orlyk sneered.

“That’s idiocy,” Vinov said in a firm but friendly tone of voice. “Would you dismiss the unemployment numbers that way? How do you think they’re calculated? Does the Kripo follow people around all day? No, they survey the non-employed population and ask if they are looking for a job or not.”

“Well, let’s ask the expert for his opinion,” Kolov said.

“What do you think?” Jansky asked, looking to Kolov.

“I lean toward agreeing with Orlyk.”

Jansky pondered for a minute what he would say. He agreed with Vinov, certainly. But if Orlyk’s narrative could undermine confidence in Anton Linov, it would be to his advantage not to combat it.

“I don’t want to take up sides until I’ve thought about it more. I was able to predict this in part because I didn’t immediately run and shout my finding from the rooftops. I waited until I had real confidence in it.”

“A gun is pointed toward your head. Who is right, myself or Ivan?” Orlyk asked. From his tone of voice, he had a lot of desire to win the argument.

“I lean toward Ivan’s point of view at the moment,” he said. It would not be difficult to walk it back later if he needed to do so. In fact, he could cite his initial disagreement to prove he was “open-minded.”

Orlyk looked a bit ruffled by the fact that Jansky took Ivan’s side but soon smiled. Vinov and Orlyk resumed their arguing and mostly talked past one another. Orlyk came back, over and over, to the fact that he, unlike Kolov, Vinov, and Jansky, grew up amidst the elite class. He did not seem to realize that an outside observer, while having the disadvantage of less experience than an insider, can also have the advantage of less bias. He seemed dogmatic in a way that was unusual for him. Perhaps he was animated by Jansky’s successful prediction and concluded it would be to his advantage to ‘go big or go home.’

After about ten minutes, Vinov’s phone rang, and his wife demanded that

they leave now as she ‘has work in the mourning.’ Jansky took the opportunity to leave as well but was mobbed by so many people congratulating him that he struggled to get out the door.

On the walk home, he thought more about the narrative of Gena Orlyk, wondering if it would resonate with others in the same way it evidently resonated with him.

Chapter 10

Toma Jansky drank a cup of coffee substitute as he checked his email on the morning of Monday, May 14, 2096. He was disappointed but hardly surprised to learn that Foster wanted him to meet a client at 2:30 P.M. that day. He had met clients the past Friday and Saturday, both of whom congratulated him on the prediction but kindly asked why he didn't use the information to make any money. He explained that the information was already accounted for in the market price, which seemed to go in one ear and out the other. That was fine, for if they were really intelligent they wouldn't be investing with Dador. He received another email that morning from Vinov, telling him that the latest periodical from the Institute for the Study of the Subhuman Question had arrived at the library. There was, as he expected, no mention of the mandate. The issue had probably been finalized before it went out.

That Sunday, the Kyiv Business Association had an emergency meeting, forcing a cancellation of the Glanzia Forum meeting. 'Subhumans' could not be at the meeting itself, but Maslak and Jansky met with notables unofficially afterward. The men shook Jansky's hand and praised him as a genius. One would think, upon meeting a 'genius,' that you might want to ask him some questions, see if his talent could be put to productive use. The men he met at KBA didn't. Maslak was the person whose opinion they wanted to hear. So long as that was fine with Maslak, it was fine with Jansky. The question Maslak was asked over and over was, "are things stable in the ghetto?" Probably they didn't have any idea what kind of instability might arise. The ghetto was a black box to them, one that could massively impact their business if the Kripo "closed" it for even a single day. Maslak could have taken the opportunity to badmouth Linov, saying things were not stable and that the reason was the weak leadership of Anton Linov. Instead, he said, "things are fine; you shouldn't worry." Linov was wrong about Maslak. Alternatively, Maslak was playing the long game. Indeed, one is more likely to take a sudden warning of instability seriously if it comes from a man who always said things were stable. But Occam's Razor said Maslak was simply doing what he thought best for the ghetto.

During the meeting, Jansky learned he was not the only one who predicted the mandate. But the others, like him, told people on the down-low, only taking public credit after the mandate was announced. They were easily-forgotten American names in Kyiv's financial industry. As far as Jansky knew, he was the only Russian who publicly told people, though, of course, the usual suspects claimed they did know but "kept it a secret." It was possible that all the information derived from Toma Jansky, Maslak had told people at the KBA and someone could have learned from him but pretended to have independently made the discovery. They could, of course, make the

same allegation against Jansky.

As far as Jansky could tell, no great decisions were made at the “emergency” KBA meeting. They were held because the businessmen had to look like they were “doing something” about this thing that might possibly affect their business many years down the line. So they met, exchanged stories, ate, and drank. What they absolutely could not have done was say, “that will only impact us many years down the line if it impacts us at all, so let’s cross the bridge when we come to it.” That would be “short-term bias,” a big no-no in the first-tier world. The second tier went on designing web pages, cleaning up spills, laying concrete foundations, and doing other unglamorous but often vital tasks, unaffected by the need to signal a long-term orientation.

While everyone knew that one had to make a show of “planning” for the “changing market conditions,” first-tier business leaders were initially confused about how big of a deal to make about it ‘politically.’ They had been forced to make statements of loyalty after the Eugenic Protection Decree. But that seriously impacted their own lives. July 11 wasn’t a big deal, for subhuman fertility was supposed to be a technical affair, like the width of drainage pipes. But it soon became clear that “May 12” would be a major deal in a way that July 11 wasn’t. July 11 mainly forced well-off subhumans to spend their own money on more children, money they would have spent on consumption goods. Its effect on interest rates was relatively minor. May 12 had a much more significant impact. Because of this, the Nazis wanted to see the subjects express their approval. At least that was what the TV said. Jansky thought the real reason was the contradiction between the “Malthusian” nature of the old Nazism and the “cornucopian” nature of the new Nazism.

Regardless, the subjects certainly did express their approval. Jansky supposed that many Russian secretaries got paged over the weekend, asked to write up statements supporting the new mandate. Almost every shop on Vanbar street put a sign saying “The Fuhrer is Always Right” in their window.

There were also massive rallies in support of Litzer held throughout the Reich, including in Kyiv’s parks. Litzer gave a brief address on the radio, thanking the people for their support. Yet even on this grand occasion, the notorious grouch could not resist the urge to rant and threaten, being angered at the littering that occurred during the celebrations and warning that repeat offenders would be sent to labor camps. How much of the rallying was sincere? How much was just an excuse to party? Jansky was struck by the reaction of some of the American businessmen at the KBA meeting. They were determined to read into the speech that Litzer was speaking to the Reich subjects as well as the Germans. They knew the colloquial meaning of Litzer’s phrase “my Volk,” that it referred only to the German ethnic community. But they nevertheless convinced themselves he didn’t mean what he said. The President of the KBA, a handsome forty-something man named Harold Keyes, had given a speech in which he referred to the *Arische Rasse*

(Aryan Race) as if it was a Nazi term. The Germans, Americans, and Indians were all part of this supposed race, he said. He didn't seem to have noticed that the Nazis stopped talking about the *Arische Rasse* fifty years ago.

After Jansky checked his email, he brought up one of the financial journalist websites, *The Financial Observer*. It had wall-to-wall coverage of the mandate. As usual, it dealt entirely with the perspective of the Reich subject investor. There was nothing about how it would impact the subhumans or what they thought about it. As Jansky was reading passively, he was jolted to attention by a noise from the door. It was the errand boy Maxim Semko who got out of his office and opened the external door, but Jansky and the others were watching. In came Anton Linov and the policeman, Kondrat Pavlov.

It was déjà vu all over again. What did he want this time? Jansky had given Pavlov his last report the past Wednesday, and perhaps he wanted to know immediately what Maslak was up to. But why would he come personally rather than send Pavlov to call on him? Was it a joke? Perhaps. Jansky took a sip of coffee, locked his computer, stood up, and walked out, as did Alya Semko. Orlov and Egorov remained at their desks.

Anton Linov was dressed in his dark blue business suit and smiled as if he was having lots of fun. Pavlov, in the standard ghetto police uniform, stood to his left in the typical pose of the emotionless guard.

"Hello, Toma," Linov said. "I am here to give you your official offer of appointment to the Popular Commission for Oversight of the Enforcement of the Productivization Mandate," he said. He pronounced the name as if it were a new and highly effective weapon. He handed Jansky a blue folder containing what looked like a single sheet of white paper.

"I'm... uh, honored, Mr. President. But as you know, I am currently employed with Dador."

"The commission will meet once per week, and in fact, probably less than that. It's an unpaid position, of course. First meeting is this Saturday at 1 pm; location's on the letter." He spoke in a cocky voice as if he was explaining to a defeated rival how he had been trapped. "If you do not want the position, I can find someone else."

"I am honored, Mr. President," said Jansky uneasily. "I accept the appointment."

"I knew you would," he said. "Now, I'd love to stay and chat, but I have more appointments to make. I'm confident you'll do well on the commission." He reached out and shook Jansky's hand.

"I will give my absolute best effort to the commission," said Jansky. He wished he had thought up something more clever.

Linov and Pavlov then turned and left. Egorov and Orlov then stood up and walked out into the central meeting area.

"I heard. Congratulations," Egorov said.

"Indeed," Maxim Semko said, smiling at Jansky. "Congratulations."

Maslak must have pulled some strings.”

Alya Semko shot her son a hostile look, who quickly looked regretful. It was reasonable to assume that it was Maslak pulling strings. Perhaps Orlov and Egorov thought so. But one wasn’t supposed to say such things out loud.

“Why do you think you were chosen?” Egorov asked.

“I did predict this thing,” Jansky said. “I guess Linov wants to look like he’s listening to people like me.”

Alya Semko smiled. “I’ve never heard of that side of him.”

“He’s getting old. His son will be up for ‘election’ soon,” Egorov said. “Probably figures he’s gotta pay some lip service to smart people.”

“Is that what the council wants?” Orlov asked.

“Councilmen all think they’re smart,” Egorov said.

“I guess so,” Orlov replied.

“That’s probably it,” Jansky said, looking to Egorov. “I’ll try not to get my hopes up too much, anyway. What’s it called,” he said as he opened the folder and read the title. ‘The Popular Commission for Oversight of the Enforcement of the Productivization Mandate.’ That screams ‘no real authority.’” He smiled. “But it will be another title for my resume. I’ll tell you all how the first meeting goes.”

“I look forward to it,” Alya Semko said. “For now, I’m sure we all have a lot of work to do.”

They did, except for the princeling Semko, and they each walked back to their offices. Jansky unlocked his computer, logged onto *Koppeln*, and added the new title to his resume, marking it as an unpaid position.

Why did Linov appoint him to the commission? There was a certain logic to it. It helped to undermine the narrative that the government was closed to people like Jansky without giving him any real authority. If Jansky later used his influence to oppose Linov, Linov could portray him as an ungrateful subordinate, a “disgruntled employee.” Finally, it would help to give Jansky a position independent from Yuri Maslak, where he could schmooze with elites and look for jobs. But Linov would have to do better than an unpaid part-time job if he wanted Jansky to break with his patron. A good first start would be some response to his repeated requests to meet Taras Linov.

The following week was a daze. Jansky wrote “analyses” of the mandate and met many more Dador clients. In the evenings, he visited his parents, cousins, old friends, new friends, and talked through a long video call with Nora’s parents. Over and over again, he heard predictions that the elites would disobey the mandate, which would trigger a massive Kripo reprisal. They asked his opinion and he consistently disappointed them by responding with, “I need time to think.” He did, but not about whether the fears were justified. In the privacy of his mind, he gave it a name, the Bogeyman. He spoke about the Bogeyman with Maslak, Vinov, Sorokin and his wife. All agreed that the fears were spurious and all agreed they should endeavor to promote them. But not immediately. People expected Maslak and his crew to grasp at any

argument they could use to undermine confidence in Linov. It was better if they heard about the Bogeyman from other people first, so Maslak could not be accused of creating it. And it was easier to convince a “fence-sitter” if one could claim to be a former fence-sitter oneself. This was perhaps why Hitler claimed that he initially dismissed the antisemitic press as primitive and un-German. Jansky assumed that Gena Orlyk, unaware of their plotting, had gone out spreading fear of the Bogeyman immediately.

The fact that Orlyk believed in the Bogeyman led Jansky to give it some honest consideration. The Americans said that one should be open-minded but not so much that his head falls out. Jansky tried to act in this spirit. He didn’t have the time to give serious consideration to all ideas. The time he gave them was inversely proportional to how intuitively crazy they seemed. He gave an hour to the idea of alien UFOs. He gave a day to the supposed secret societies of crypto-Jews. Gena Orlyk was a smart man, so he would give the idea about a day of consideration. After all, if Jansky could believe it himself, he’d be all the better at advocating that others should believe it, too.

His “steel-man,” the argument he would make to others, would be as follows. A small but not inconsiderable proportion of people *really* do not want to have children. Perhaps 5%, equally divided between men and women. Forcing them to marry would not be difficult. Forcing them to conceive would. It will be trivially easy to find someone else to buy condoms for you, and there is always the “natural method.” The Nazis did not specify what punishments pillars should impose against violators. They simply said evasion would “not be tolerated.” People, particularly members of the elite, would interpret this as a “sign of weakness.” Which it would not be. But the members of the elite would think this because they grew up in a cloistered, protected life. They never venture out into the world. They never get interrogated on the streets by an American policeman. They think the world is much nicer than it really is.

And this culture will exert pressure on those tasked with handing out exemptions. The two groups who can do so will be doctors judging whether infertility exceptions should be handed out and judges deciding if “spousal abandonment” exceptions can be handed out. The judges will be able to resist the pressure because awarding an exemption to one person will require the finding of fault in another. But the doctors will find the pressure more difficult to resist. There will be whispers about particular doctors, and some may be hauled before the Russian court system. But the doctors are high-status experts and the judges will be reluctant to rule against them lest their cocktail party invitations dry up. Even if they are hostile to evasion in the abstract, they may convince themselves the doctors are victims, “forced” to provide exemptions. So long as everyone is discreet about it, the judges quietly quash prosecution. Some will be less discrete about it, and traitors will report real or imagined violators to the Kripo. The Kripo will issue warrants for their arrest, with the threat of a 100,000 WM fine for every year they are still at large.

Ordinarily, this is a no-brainer, the ghetto police don't like losing money and those they are ordered to arrest are usually people nobody wants around. But if they are high-status experts, it's a different game. For a while, the fine is paid. Taxes on all productive people must be raised and then raised some more. Eventually, the Kripo loses its patience, deposes the council, and launches a raid that will kill hundreds.

It was the strongest version of the argument, yet it still fell dramatically short in Jansky's mind. For the story to be convincing, one of two things had to be true. There had to be an already existing cultural script that tolerated lawbreaking among the elites. Or there had to be a reason to expect people to want one for this particular law. There was no elite cultural script that tolerated lawbreaking, and thus it was rare, mainly consisting of tax evasion. Many in the middle and working classes believed the elites were sex perverts or widespread users of cocaine, opium, or marijuana. Jansky disbelieved the narrative as a teenager and felt he could dismiss it with even more confidence at age thirty. There was a fair amount of adultery among the elites, but this was not usually illegal. Adulterers usually came from one-quarter of people who, upon marriage, expressed deep revulsion toward infidelity but filled out the box stating that the laws should not apply to them.

As for the tax cheats, while there were a fair number, there was no culture of tolerance. Everyone knew that the tax cheat was not hiding money from the Germans but from the pillar. Tax officials arrested a fair number of them, giving fines to the lesser ones and sending the worst offenders to concentration camps. They faced no opprobrium and were freely invited to all manner of parties. Jansky knew from the earliest diaries what a "culture of criminality" looked like. It was a culture where the ghetto police were treated as pariahs. If the elites looked down on the ghetto police, it was only because the profession was considered low-class.

Was there any reason to expect the situation to be different for violators of the mandate? Jansky could not see it. The large majority of people would not want to evade the mandate. While evaders will be somewhat more sympathetic than tax cheats, they will also be more pathetic and low-status. As to the "problems" of what to do with a couple who insisted they could not conceive, Jansky thought the problem would be simple. Increasing fractions of their income would be taken from them and held onto until the first child's birth. They will be driven to more and more misery until eventually they relent or are given an exemption. The incredibly stubborn will get exemptions they do not deserve, but they will be so tiny a population they will not matter.

If the Bogeyman is not real, why do people believe in it? This class of reasoning, if taken too far, could be circular. Still, the "people believe in it because it is correct" is the simplest, Occam's Razor explanation. Jansky thought it sufficient to point out that in nearly every instance when the Nazis did something, people overrated resistance and compliance. Before World War III, some diarists believed in a supposed anti-Nazi "resistance" in

occupied Russia, battling the Nazis with small arms and no hope of victory. After the war, they predicted that the Nazis would not have enough troops to enforce the deportations. When they arrived in the ghettos, they predicted that masses of people would walk or hop freight cars back to Siberia. They said Russians would refuse to learn German (despite the fact that in occupied Russia, nearly everyone knew at least some German), that prewar political loyalties would be maintained indefinitely, and that most Russians would always be religious. Some predicted that once the younger generation of Russians grew up able to speak perfect German, the badge laws would be “unenforceable.” In Jansky’s own time, there was widespread discussion of impractical tax evasion strategies in the aftermath of July 11.

By the time Saturday rolled around, Jansky was decidedly worn out from work and meetings. He arrived early for the commission’s first meeting to give himself a chance to familiarize himself with others before it began. The meeting was to take place on the fourth floor of Yamel, part of the building used for the pillar council. He walked into the lobby of “4A,” which strongly resembled the Zoning Department lobby, except it was smaller. There were black chairs, small brown tables, orange overhead lights, and a woman behind a desk. She was rather pretty, with black hair and blue eyes, and was filling out some kind of paperwork. It was 12:45 pm, fifteen minutes before the meeting.

“Hello,” Jansky said to the woman. “I am Toma Jansky, here for the meeting of the Popular Commission for Oversight of the Enforcement of the Productivization Mandate, in room 4A-2.”

She looked at him skeptically, perhaps wondering what the young man she had never seen before was doing on such a commission. She typed his name into her computer and presumably saw there was indeed an attendee named Toma Jansky. “ID please,” she said in the plain and bored “office voice.”

He took his ID out of his wallet and handed it to the woman. She put it under her ID scanner. Jansky could see her computer monitor at an angle and saw his ID and face. After looking back and forth several times at Jansky, the ID, and the image on the computer, she gave him the ID back.

“I’ve been told to call you when the meeting starts.”

Jansky was surprised. Was there another meeting in that room that would get out at precisely 1 p.m.? He presumed a high-level group like the commission wouldn’t have to deal with such frivolity. He briefly imagined the commission being a giant joke, with Toma Jansky joining janitors, bus drivers, and garbage collectors in a parody of democratic governance. No, he thought, Anton Linov doesn’t seem like the humorous type, and Taras Linov was probably too stupid to come up with something like that. Maybe one of Linov’s smarter advisors? No, people weren’t in the mood for jokes.

Jansky sat down in one of the plain black chairs. He got out his copy of *How to Think Like a Eugenicist* and began skimming through it. Seven

minutes later, a man walked up to the woman at the desk and told her he, too, was there for the commission meeting. Several more came in quick succession. Jansky didn't know who else had been appointed to the commission, but it was reasonable to assume most were pillar employees who worked on the neighboring floors, able to wait until the last minute for the meeting and know they wouldn't be late.

There would only be a few minutes more before the meeting started, but Jansky decided to start a conversation with one of the men. He got up and sat down next to a man in a black business suit who looked like he was in his thirties. He had curly brown hair, blue eyes, and a nerdish look.

"Hello," Jansky said, sitting down next to the man. "I heard you're here for the meeting of the popular commission for such and such. I'm on it too. Name's Toma Jansky," he said. He reached out and shook the man's hand.

The man looked impressed. "So you're the guy I keep hearing about? Who, they say, knew this was gonna happen?"

"The one."

"Well," he said. "I'm by nature a bit skeptical, but you either predicted it or managed to convince some of the smartest people in this ghetto that you did so. Either way, that's a major accomplishment."

"I'll take the compliment," Jansky said, smiling.

"The name's Sergei Boyko," the man said.

"What do you do?" Jansky asked.

"I'm a doctor," Boyko said. "I specialize in fertility. I assume that's why I'm here."

Jansky was about to respond when Artur Savel, the head of the Ghetto Police, walked into the lobby and went straight for the woman at the front desk. Jansky and Boyko both turned to see the celebrity.

"Hello," said Savel to the woman at the desk. "Here for the meeting." He evidently did not need to identify who he was or what meeting he was referring to. Savel was tall, burly, clean-shaven, and had short blond hair, being forty-nine years old. While everyone else wore business suits, Savel wore the standard ghetto police uniform.

"I've been told to call you all back when the meeting starts," the woman said apologetically.

"Okay," Savel said, looking annoyed. He went and sat down opposite Jansky and Boyko.

Jansky turned back to Boyko. "As for me," he said, "I work in finance."

"Of course," Boyko said. He lowered his voice. "I'm surprised Savel is here. I mean, we need someone from the police department, but I'd have expected a more junior man."

"Myself as well," Jansky said. In truth, he did not know what to expect, as he had never served on such a commission. "Have you ever served on a commission like this?" he asked.

"This is my first time," Boyko said. "And you?"

“My first time as well.”

At that moment, a woman looking to be in her thirties, with black hair and brown eyes, came over to the two and sat down next to Boyko. She had a pretty face, though she was slightly overweight. Boyko turned to her.

“This is Toma Jansky,” Boyko said.

She smiled. “I’ve heard grand things about you,” she said. She reached out and shook her hand.

Jansky smiled. “I’d bet some of them are true.”

“I’m Rosa Bondar. Fertility doctor, a colleague of Sergei’s,” she said.

As she sat down, Anton Linov walked into the room, carrying a small blue folder and accompanied by a younger policeman. Jansky looked up at the clock behind the secretary’s desk. It was exactly 1 pm.

Linov looked around the lobby and smiled. “All those who are here for the productivization mandate commission, follow me,” he said.

Everyone got up and followed Linov as he opened the door and walked through the hallway. They only had to walk past a single room before they reached 4A-2. The room was large, though not excessively so, with a large black table that seated two each on its short ends and seven each on its long ends. As the members sat down, Jansky chose a seat near the end of the table, away from the door Linov was standing by and away from Savel, who would be the most senior man on the commission. Boyko and Bondar sat across from him. Despite the large, open windows, the room was dark as the day was unusually cloudy, so Linov turned a dial that ever so slightly activated the lights above. The most prestigious employers usually have their offices at the tops of buildings so that neighboring buildings don’t block out the sun. Jansky didn’t know why the pillar was an exception to this. Across from the windows was a large painting of some children at an orchestra, playing violins and cellos. It was an unusually good painting, contrasting with the cliché paintings he usually saw in pillar offices.

After everyone except Linov and the policeman who followed him sat down, Jansky counted sixteen people, fourteen men and two women, excluding Linov and his assistant.

“Welcome,” Linov said, “to the first meeting of the Popular Commission for Oversight of the Enforcement of the Productivization Mandate. Name’s a mouthful, I know. You can rename it if you want. You can also decide where, when, and how often you’d like to meet.” He opened the blue folder and looked toward the inside of it. “The members are Artur Savel, Chief of the Ghetto Police, Josef Kovalevsky, Captain of the Ghetto Police West Precinct, Alexander Animov, Special Investigator with the Ghetto Police, Vlasii Volkov, President of the Internal Affairs Department of the Ghetto Police, Arkady Balandin, Personal Counsel to the President of the Pillar Council, Stepan Borysenko, Accounting Manager at the Tax Department, Ilya Kazakov, Accounting Manager at the Tax Department, Garry Gagarin, Principal of Bendzary Public High School, Yevhen Puhach, Co-Principal of

Mykhajlo Antonyuk High School, Alina Furman, Co-Principal of Mykhajlo Antonyuk High School, Toma Jansky, Financial Analyst at Dador Capital, Leonid Lukyo, Chairman of the Winter Aid, Ruslan Romanov, Vice President of the Welfare Office, Artur Buryak, Chief Accountant at the Welfare Office, Sergei Boyko, Specialist in Human Fertility at the North Kyiv Ghetto Medical Association, and Rosa Bondar, Specialist in Human Fertility at the North Kyiv Ghetto Medical Association.” Linov paused, looked around for a second, and smiled. “I’ll leave you to your business.” He walked out the door and waved as he closed it.

The membership was basically what he expected. The one name that stood out was Leonid Lukyo, the Chairman of the Winter Aid. Jansky had remembered the names and ages of all the council members and their likely successors. Councilman Dubov Lukyo, if Jansky remembered correctly, was fifty-eight. His only son and presumed successor was Leonid Lukyo. Leonid looked like he was in his mid-thirties, but it was hard to say.

For a few seconds, there was an awkward silence as there was no designated *Führer* in the group. Sergei Boyko decided to be the first to speak.

“So,” Boyko said, “we’ve got doctors, a lawyer, policemen, tax people, welfare people, educators, and a man from finance,” he said, looking to Toma Jansky. He then turned back to the group and smiled. “So, where’s the representative from the working class?”

He meant it as a joke, but nobody laughed. Jansky and Rosa Bondar smiled. The others looked plain or uncomfortable.

“The gender distribution is also removed from proportionality, only two women and fourteen men,” Boyko said.

Again nobody laughed.

“Tough crowd,” Boyko said. “So, does this not-very-representative commission have any real power?”

“This is a ghetto. You know how it works,” said Arkady Balandin, Linov’s personal lawyer. “We are not a democracy. The Nazis would come in here, guns blazing, if we tried to set up a democratic system. If you want to resign at the unfairness of it, I’m sure someone can be found to take your place.” Though Balandin was smiling, his tone of voice indicated real anger.

“Alright,” Boyko said. “I’ll toe the line.”

Jansky imagined contributing to the humor by asking what the Nazis would do if they filled the commission, or even the pillar council itself, with a random sample of the ghetto population. It wouldn’t exactly be democracy, would it? But he was conscious of being probably the youngest man there except for maybe the princeling Lukyo. He should speak when spoken to.

“Would anyone object,” said Stepan Borysenko, “if I were to record the minutes of the meeting?” Borysenko was a high official, but not the highest, at the tax department. He appeared about fifty and was handsome for that age, with long, curly, blackish-gray hair and glasses. He wore a business suit with no tie, apparently a tradition at the tax department for a reason Jansky didn’t

know. He reached down, presumably to a briefcase, and picked up a speaker and recorder.

“You’ll transcribe it later?” asked Artur Savel.

“My assistant will,” Borysenko said.

“Presumably without our names?” asked Savel.

“Yes, without our names. The transcript will be emailed to all of you.” He got out a piece of paper. “Write your email addresses on this sheet,” he said, handing it to his colleague, Ilya Kazakov. Kazakov wrote and passed the paper along. Borysenko eyed the room to see if there were any objections. Nobody spoke. Jansky understood why the recording would be transcribed and emailed rather than sent by itself. Council decisions would be recorded, but an individual’s opinion would not be unless his name was directly mentioned, and if cornered, one could assert a transcription error.

“Alright,” said Stepan Borysenko, as the paper continued to be passed around. “I guess I’ll start with the official business of the commission. The first question is how many exceptions we’ll have to give for infertility. I assume the doctors can help with that.”

“Not many,” Boyko said. “True infertility is rare. What we call infertility is mostly just the natural result of waiting until you’re running on forty years old to have children. We call it that to be nice, but that’s not what it is.”

Bondar nodded her agreement.

“Then what’s the real rate?”

“Impossible to say with certainty, since many who are infertile at 22 do not discover this because they don’t try to have children at that age. But I’d guess it at maybe 1 to 2 percent of both genders.”

Borysenko smiled. “Alright, good to know. Next question is, how many will be exempted because of mental and physical disabilities. We already face that issue in the welfare system, separating the truly disabled from the malingeringers.” He looked to the welfare office officials.

“Agreed,” said Artur Buryak, the Vice President of the welfare office.

Borysenko smiled. “So, from reading the Nazi pronouncements, the exemptions we can give out are infertility for women and ‘the partner’s infertility’ for men. I assume this means that an infertile man is supposed to ask his wife to use a sperm donor.” He looked around the room to make sure his understanding was correct.

Most people nodded.

“Now, the really hard one here is ‘spousal abandonment,’” Borysenko said. “We’re still waiting on the Nazis to elaborate on what that term means.”

“Has anyone made a formal request to elaborate?” asked Boyko.

“I haven’t,” Borysenko said. He looked curiously around the room to see if any of the other bureaucrats had done so on their own initiative. Nobody spoke up.

“Should we make a request,” Boyko said.

“We tend to do that sparingly,” said Artur Savel. “Remember, we don’t

need to decide this stuff now. The Nazis will issue a supplementary decree when they feel like issuing a supplementary decree. That's how they operate."

Boyko looked dissatisfied with the answer.

"I'd like to hear from Toma Jansky," Borysenko said.

Jansky smiled briefly. "On my marriage, there is a spousal abandonment clause. If one of us wants to desert the spouse without cause, the kids will belong to the abandoned spouse, as judged by J.G.N. J.G.N. is a private arbitration provider, but some couples prefer the pillar court system itself. So we already have experience with this."

The room turned to Arkady Balandin, who looked surprised as he presumably did not see himself as a representative of the "legal profession." "I agree with Mr. Jansky," he said in an insincere tone. Jansky thought he simply could think of nothing else to say.

Borysenko smiled. "Now, relating to spousal abandonment, I can outline a few edge cases. While, in theory, the only legal mandate is being placed on women, the Nazis have been clear that practicality dictates that pillars enforce a parallel mandate on men. They must marry and they must do their duty within the marriage. Now, infertile woman gets an exception; her husband must have one too, I'm sure we can all agree?"

The room nodded.

"And suppose they break up and the court finds her at fault. At least in some circumstances, it would be unreasonable if we were to demand he marry again, correct?"

The room again nodded.

"So he keeps his exemption. She marries again. Does the new guy get an exemption?"

"No," said Alexander Animov, one of the policemen.

"Seems perfectly reasonable," Borysenko said. "But remember that we'd be saying this to real-life people. A real-life couple in love, not an abstraction on a page."

"If they feel their rights are being violated, they can take it up with the Nazis," Animov said.

"They'd point to the Nazi laws and say that nothing there forces us to do this."

"Nazi laws force women to have at least three children," Animov said. "It is unreasonable to expect them to do so without husbands, and we can't permit men to get out of that by marrying and then getting divorced by infertile women. I'm not saying we need a heartless bureaucratic rule. We can make case-by-case exceptions, but in general, the idea should be that if an infertile woman wants to divorce her husband without good cause, her remaining options will be those men who already have children or already possess exemptions. That's not to say they can't take up with one another, but no marriage license will be issued or exemption granted."

"It reminds me of the story of Romeo and Juliet," said Boyko.

Several of the members looked confused at Boyko's reference.

"It's an old English play," said Boyko.

"Yeesh," sneered Ilya Kazakov, a tax department man.

Boyko turned toward Kazakov. "I read it in German translation. It's good," Boyko said.

"I'm sure it is," replied Kazakov. "But I'm also sure it has an excess of sentimentality. If the English had less, maybe we'd have won the war."

Boyko shrugged. "The Brits and their American cousins do have a reputation for believing that it's unreasonable to ask them to put anything, family, nation, whatever, before their personal sexual pleasure."

"I do expect the comparison to be made," Jansky said. "I would say that the education system must imbue the attitude that we have no freedom. We are subhumans. If anyone complains about it, the response should be 'no shit sherlock.' And if they want to blame the pillar, they should be reminded that there are places where there is nothing between us and the Nazis. The term for them is 'concentration camp.'"

That received a warm response, especially from the three educators. Boyko, too, smiled and nodded.

"Why are we pretending like this is our decision?" asked Leonid Lukyo. "Won't the Nazis just make the decision for us?" Lukyo, the councilman's son, had very short brown hair, a short mustache, and a broad Slavic face. He spoke with an unerring sureness.

"Maybe," Jansky said. "But look at our welfare system now. The Nazis hand us the tax bill equivalent to the head tax times ninety-nine percent of our adult population. They assume that one percent are disabled and cannot pay, but the decision about who to exempt and how many exemptions to give out is ours. They don't micromanage the process."

"They are doing so here," Lukyo said. "They aren't saying, produce this many babies in a year. There is more going on here."

"You're quite right," Jansky said. "If they simply said make babies, the rich would pay the poor and stupid to do it for them. Dysgenics would set in, and over the long haul, the Nazis would be able to extract less in value from us as our native abilities decline."

"Seems like they should be able to account for that."

"They could; it would just require a lot of manpower. People in the ghetto loyal to them taking IQ test measurements and so on. Whereas this, all you have to do is verify that the people already in their databases come to the offices with their children, and DNA testing can verify that they really are the people's children."

Lukyo had nothing to say to this, and Jansky hoped he was not angry with him. After a few seconds of silence, Borysenko spoke. "Let's get to another matter," he said. "What do we do with the people without an exemption and still refuse to produce children?"

"Konzentrationslager," Kazakov said, using the German word for

'concentration camp.'

"Yes, eventually, but first we do warnings. What does the warning process look like? Suppose someone says, yes, I'd like to marry, have children, blah blah blah, but can't find a partner. What do we do?"

Nobody responded, perhaps not wanting to find themselves in disagreement with the room.

"Does Toma Jansky have any ideas," Borysenko said.

Jansky smiled. "He does indeed," he said. "Now, it's not hard to have three children. You don't need to marry at eighteen years old or anything. But we have an age by which everyone needs to be married, probably higher for men than women. If you reach this age and claim you can't find a partner, you must spend one Sunday a month in what will inevitably be called the loser's ball. It will be in a school, most likely, where these men and women must go and socialize. At first, they are allowed to come out having rejected all candidates with an 'I'll wait for next month, or I'll find a partner on my own.' By the time they reach a certain age, they are basically told that they need to go in and come out with someone, period, or else go to a KZ."

"I see a problem here," said Boyko. "There are more men than women, born in every cohort."

"So we give out eugenic exemptions to men more freely."

"How will we avoid an incentive for malingering?"

"I'm not sure it will be that big of a deal," Jansky said. "But suppose you had a man who doesn't want to marry. He pretends to be just really stupid, he can do some very simple job, but that's about it. And he says, women aren't attracted to me, shouldn't be forced to marry me, and anyway I don't *really* want to be married, yada yada yada.' So he asks for a eugenic exemption. When in reality, he just wants to fool around, have short-term relationships with younger women who don't need to marry until later. We could make him wear a special symbol in public. Women will be strongly encouraged to treat him as a pariah. To the man who really is treated as a pariah by women already, this is little harm."

"Impressive," said Boyko. "You really do know how to think like a Nazi," he said, smiling.

Jansky smiled back. "I prefer to say I know how to think like a eugenist." He got out his copy of the book and waved it around. "If you want to engage with the mentality of the men who drafted the productivization mandate, I would recommend this book."

"Where did you get it?" asked Alina Furman, one of the principals of the Mykhajlo Antonyuk private high school. She seemed honestly surprised to learn such a book existed and was accessible to subhumans. Jansky suppressed his disgust. It would be understandable for someone in the working class to be surprised by this, but a principal ought to know better.

"I bought it on BookSmart," he said, referring to the online marketplace. "But I'm sure they have copies at all the libraries."

“Does this all seem surreal?” asked Leonid Lukyo. He was looking all around the room but particularly at Jansky.

“How so?”

“We know our ancestors had, what, seven children per woman? Why bother with the crude method of force? Why not just recreate them?”

“They can’t well send us back to an agrarian society,” said Jansky. “I mean, they could, but it would be enormously economically destructive.”

“You could replicate those conditions, but not on the farm?”

“Yes, and everyone has a,” he stopped himself before saying “crackpot,” “everyone has a theory about why, but they don’t feel they have time to test them all. So they just use force.”

“They’ve gotten their own fertility rate up to 2.5.”

“By throwing money at the problem,” Jansky said. “They obviously can’t do that with us. So they just use force.”

“I suppose that makes sense,” Lukyo said.

The meeting continued for another hour, with Borysenko, Boyko, and Jansky being the ones who most commonly spoke. Some of the rest looked engaged with the meeting, and others looked bored. The two male principals, Garry Gagarin and Yevhen Puhach, were the ones who most obviously did not want to be there. Neither made a sound throughout. Their colleague Alina Furman was more boisterous, but her thoughts were invariably uninformed, and she likely would have been better served remaining silent. The policemen, aside from Savel, didn’t look happy to be there, while their boss remained quiet and dignified. The tax and welfare officials were more engaged. At the end of the meeting, Jansky asked whether they should rename the commission. Several ideas were found wanting, and they accepted his suggestion to keep the official long-form name and use the simple, short-form name: “eugenics board.”

He also asked if the commission should designate a President. He suggested Borysenko, who had taken charge at the beginning of the meeting. But Borysenko demured, instead suggesting Jansky. He accepted and was unanimously elected. Jansky was happy and was surprised, though perhaps he shouldn’t have been. Most of the members did not want to be there. Most of them were aristocrats and Jansky wasn’t, but they liked to think of themselves as supporters of meritocracy in an abstract sense and giving Jansky a position that had no pay and no real power allowed them to indulge that belief.

The final act of the Eugenics Board was to set their meetings to the same time, once a month.

After the meeting ended, Boyko and Bondar walked up to Jansky. “Hey,” Boyko said. “You want to go get a drink, the three of us?”

“Sure,” Jansky said. “After this hectic week, I could certainly use a drink.”

“Cool,” Boyko said. The three of them walked out of the lobby and took the stairs down to the first floor.

“Any bar you’d like to go to?”

“Well, I’m not much of a bar person,” Boyko said. “My apartment is only two streets down, if that’s okay with you.”

A chill went down Jansky’s spine as he briefly considered the potential danger. President Linov had threatened him with death, after all. But if he were to kill Jansky, this was a stupid way to do it. To Boyko, of course, there was no danger in what he was offering Jansky, for Jansky was taller and probably stronger than Sergei Boyko and could undoubtedly overpower Rosa Bondar. “Cool with me,” Jansky said. “I’m not much of a bar person either.”

“Great,” Boyko said.

Jansky wondered if they were inviting him to a private place to pick his brain for information about the market or his potential elite connections. Talking to people over the past week, he had gotten the feeling that many did not quite believe he had based his prediction on publicly available market data. They seemed to suspect that the source was a chain of human whispers. A leading Nazi told his subordinate who told some Kripo man who told some American businessman who told his friend Toma Jansky. Part of this, Jansky thought, was the simple bias of preferring the intriguing explanation of human gossip to the hard-to-understand, mathy explanation of economics. Did Boyko think Jansky was more ‘elite’ than he really was? If so, Jansky thought, he would try not to correct him. But he warned himself that the Occam’s Razor explanation for why the nerdish-looking Sergei Boyko did not want to go to a bar is that he is not a bar person, as he said.

They reached Boyko’s building, whose look and feel reminded Jansky of his own, and ascended to the twenty-seventh floor. Boyko keyed into his apartment. The apartment was quite similar to Jansky’s, with a front kitchenette attached to a living and dining room. The biggest difference was the color scheme. The walls and carpet were white, the furniture was tan, and various modern art paintings featured a lot of red and orange. Boyko was not the highest-profile doctor in the ghetto; his age and title said so. But his apartment confirmed that Boyko was richer than the average doctor. Presumably, he was the fertility specialist to the stars.

Jansky could hear the sound of a television in one of the adorning rooms, and a few seconds later, a woman came out, presumably Boyko’s wife. She was pretty, with dark hair, light skin, and green eyes, and looked a decade younger than her husband.

Boyko turned to Jansky, then to the woman. “This is Toma Jansky,” he said, looking to the woman, “and this is my wife, Glasha.”

She looked surprised and a bit concerned but forced herself to smile. Jansky presumed she recognized him as the man who predicted the mandate. The two shook hands.

“Pleased to meet you,” he said.

“Pleased to meet you,” she said. She looked to her husband. “I’ve got a lot of work, unfortunately,” she said, “I’ll leave you guys to socialize.”

Jansky got the feeling that the ‘work’ consisted of watching TV and that her husband was relieved by this. They kissed lightly, and she walked back into the room with the TV.

“So what do you drink,” Boyko said.

Ordinarily, it would be too early to have more than one drink. But this was not an ordinary situation, and from their facial expressions, Boyko and Bondar seemed to feel the same way. “Glass of vodka, two shots,” he said.

Boyko got out a bottle of SDAR Vodka. The State Department of Alcohol Rationing was a horrendously inefficient state-owned enterprise that employed “working-class” Germans. Germans and Reich subjects could drink higher-taxed products, English beer, and French wine, while the ghetto was the protected market for SDAR. Boyko poured about two shots for Jansky, the same amount for Bondar, and more for himself. They began to drink.

“So,” Boyko said. “Why do you think they appointed us to the commission? I mean, I know why they appointed you.”

From the tone, Jansky judged it was a rhetorical question. “You two are fertility specialists,” Jansky said.

“Yes, we are,” Boyko said, turning to Bondar. “But you know what Linov originally wanted? He wanted Marta Sanov, our President, along with one fertility specialist. Marta Sanov tells him, ‘you can have *two* fertility specialists.’”

“Why didn’t she want to serve?”

“She said it was because she didn’t want to serve on a body that had no actual power.”

Jansky eyed the two of them skeptically. He wasn’t sure if they admired or resented their superior and didn’t want to say anything that might disrespect her.

“I think another reason is that she doesn’t want to be blamed for what will happen,” Boyko said.

“What will happen” could be interpreted as the enforcement of the mandate on the recusant. But he seemed to be implying something darker, a failure to enforce the mandate and a resulting Kripo raid. “And what do you think will happen?” Jansky asked.

“Well, you’re the expert,” Boyko replied.

“Yes. But what does your gut tell you,” Jansky said.

Boyko looked a bit surprised. Perhaps Boyko thought it rude for Jansky to ask for his opinion while refusing to share his own. But it was Boyko, not Jansky, who brought the subject up.

Boyko lowered his voice. “I think we will be under pressure to give out false exemptions.”

Jansky continued to look at him skeptically, inviting him to share more. What would *he* do when the pressure arrived? But after a few seconds of silence, it was clear Boyko either did not know what he would do or didn’t intend to share it with a man he’d just met.

“I worry about that as well,” Jansky said.

Boyko brightened up, seemingly happy that Jansky agreed with him. “I’m glad someone else sees this,” he said.

Bondar nodded her head in agreement.

Jansky nodded back. His statement was intentionally vague. After all, he had been worried about dying young in a freak accident and leaving his children without a father. This led him to buy life insurance, even though he thought the chance of this happening was low. But Boyko took his statement as expert confirmation of his views. Had Jansky forcefully disagreed, Boyko might have decided he was no expert at all. That he had ‘predicted’ the mandate because he heard it from someone else, or he was a one-hit-wonder, or a man who was a legitimate expert in economics but clueless when it came to the messy world of human behavior. But so long as Jansky acted to confirm his priors, Boyko had no reason to question his claim to expertise.

Boyko leaned toward Jansk and whispered. “My wife, she’s very loving, a great mother to our children and all, but I just can’t talk to her about this. Any time there’s an opinion that has even a remote chance of making us unpopular at parties, she just shuts down her brain and refuses to listen,” Boyko said.

“The cocktail party set doesn’t want to hear this,” said Jansky.

“No,” Boyko said, in a pose of frustrated disappointment. “It’s all, ‘let’s cross that bridge when we get to it,’ not think about it now, happy talk, happy talk. Imagine if a kid refused to attend school with that kind of attitude. ‘I’ll deal with the adult world when I get to it.’ The parents would freak! But say it about this, and it sounds reasonable.”

From Boyko’s facial expression, he hoped Jansky would share some inside information from whatever elite track he had that led to his appointment to the commission. Jansky had some and could invent more, pounding home the message that Linov and his son had to be removed from power. But he would be careful about it. Boyko should remember their conversation as him seeking out Jansky’s opinion, not as Jansky seeking converts for his ‘cause.’ “What do you think we, and I don’t mean us necessarily but the people in general, should do to avoid the undesirable outcome?”

“The problem goes to the top,” Boyko replied.

“Weak leadership?” Jansky asked.

“Yes.”

“I would agree,” Jansky said. “But it isn’t a democracy where we can just vote out the people in charge. What do you propose we do?”

“I was hoping you’d have some ideas,” Boyko said.

Bondar nodded to that, and Jansky took this as his opportunity to begin plugging his agenda. “The problem going to the top implies the name Anton Linov.”

“Have you ever met him?” Boyko asked.

“Yes, once,” he said. He lowered his voice to a whisper, and they leaned

in to hear him. “He was shockingly ignorant of the details of his own bureaucracy, what the various branches did.” Jansky leaned back and raised his voice slightly. “If the leader were a mediocrity but appointed competent people to manage the bureaucracies and someone competent to handle jurisdictional disputes, it would not be a problem. But he’s failing to do that, and his son, Taras Linov, will be even worse.”

“I don’t doubt you on that. But who replaces him?”

“Most anyone would be better.”

“I feel like we need a more thorough cleaning,” Boyko said. “But this might be a necessary first step.”

“Yes,” Jansky said. He was in no hurry to go over whatever Boyko thought would be the second and third steps.

“How do we do it?”

“We must influence the council members. The key argument is simple. The Nazis have given them the authority to remove Presidents and elect people other than the President’s son. All we are asking them to do is make use of it.”

“How do we get to them?”

“Do either of you know any councilmen?” Jansky asked.

Both doctors nodded their heads negatively.

“But I’d bet you know people who know them?”

“Yes,” Boyko said.

“I do as well,” Bondar said.

“Great. Go to cocktail parties, socialize, change people’s minds. As simple as that.”

“It makes sense,” Boyko said, looking a bit disappointed. Perhaps a juvenile part of his brain still thought the ghetto was ruled from some secret bunker where one could gain leadership by winning at chess or martial arts. The logical part of his brain knew it was as it appeared to be, so he wasn’t *that* disappointed. The cocktail set was in charge, and the most effective way to create change was to suck up to them.

If he had more trust in his new friends, Jansky would have given them other bits of advice. Exaggerate the degree of popular support for your “cause,” since notwithstanding a few Galileo wannabes, people want to hold popular views. Be careful not to go overboard in thumping your message. Make sure 90% of the conversations you have are lighthearted and uncontroversial, that people believe you are sharing your views only with some reluctance, as something that ‘must be said.’ Finally, Jansky thought, one should give advice to new ‘missionaries’ even if one doubts the advice’s effectiveness. People who have confidence in their persuasive abilities are more persuasive.

“I know it’s somewhat rude to ask, but what is your class background,” Jansky said.

“I am an aristocrat,” Boyko said, with what seemed a mix of shame and

pride. “But I passed the medical exam fair and square.”

“I know you did,” Jansky said, hoping he sounded confident. “This is an advantage. You can say that your views are not a product of your class background.” He turned to Bondar. “And you?”

“I’m part of A.G. club, and I didn’t get in for beauty,” she said.

“Good,” Jansky said.

They continued to converse for about an hour. Jansky felt that Boyko was a ‘true believer’ who thought anyone would be better than the current elites. Perhaps he was on the lower end of the aristocratic scale. As for Bondar, she said little, though she usually nodded at what Boyko did say. Neither asked about Yuri Maslak, and Jansky said nothing about him.

As Jansky walked home, he thought about the obvious thing Boyko and Bondar could do if they feared pressure to give out exemptions to the productivization mandate: switch fields. Yet they didn’t say anything about the possibility. Perhaps it was that they weren’t really as fearful as they said. Maybe it was hard to change one’s field due to the medical cartel. If they were in that position, perhaps Jansky could get Maslak to help them.

Jansky arrived at his apartment and was met by his wife. The kids were in the other room, watching some TV show. He was in an unusually passionate mood and kissed her intensely. But he had a lot he wanted to share with her. He led her over to the couch, and they sat down and hugged.

“How was it?” she asked.

“Great. Had some good discussions, met one of the members for drinks afterward,” he said, meaning to explain the smell of vodka on his breath. “And the commission elected me President.”

“Great!”

“Yeah. And they adopted my suggestion to use the short-form of ‘eugenics board.’”

“That’s the framing they want,” Nora said, surprised.

“Yes. Our job in deciding who gets exempted from the mandate is about improving the genetic quality of the Russian *volk*. We’re not just mindlessly enforcing Fuhrer Decrees.”

“I would have thought it would have been more ‘this is a difficult thing we must do but have no enthusiasm for.’”

Jansky shrugged.

“Did anyone contest your election?”

“Not a one. Even Linov’s personal lawyer voted for me. I’m honestly not sure if Linov told him I’m an ‘enemy’ or not, though I’d think he would.”

“If so, I presume he wants to look open-minded by voting for you.”

Jansky nodded.

“So who were the members?”

“They were,” he said, counting out on his hand to make sure he didn’t miss someone, “four policemen, including Artur Savel, two taxmen, two welfare department men, three principals, two Doctors, Linov’s personal

lawyer, and myself.”

“How was Artur Savel?”

Most people in the ghetto knew only two high officials in the ghetto government, Anton Linov and Artur Savel. These were the two names on the “magnolia decrees” that announced changes in pillar policy, the taxing of this or that or the banning of chewing gum in public. The two signatures gave some the impression that Linov and Savel were equals. In actuality, Linov, as Savel’s superior, could simply order him to sign any decree. But Savel certainly could influence the level of effort made to enforce this law versus that one. For people who liked chewing gum in public, he was a hated man.

“He seemed competent and dignified,” he said. “He was probably bored by the meeting but didn’t let it show the way the lesser policemen did. I recall something Maslak said that the chief of the ghetto police must be competent in a way not required for the President. He must be able to earn the respect of the Kripo man who orders him to arrest so-and-so. The Kripo man has been indoctrinated all his life to think that no Russian is worthy of respect, so this is not an easy task. Savel had to fight for his job in a way the other councilmen didn’t. Though I’m sure being the son of a high-ranking policeman helped him get it.”

“I’d bet Savel could be a ‘compromise candidate’ if he can get over the whole ‘policemen don’t get involved in politics’ thing,” Nora said.

“I don’t know. Maslak says he’s pretty committed to it.”

“Speaking of elections for a Presidency, did they say why they elect you president of the board?”

“The usual reason. One man said I can ‘think like a Nazi.’”

She smiled.

“I’m behaving like a Nazi in other ways,” he said. He walked into the children’s room and picked up the miniature whiteboard, marker, and eraser. He wrote the message out, a hedge against the off chance that someone installed listening devices in their apartment. “Like a Nazi, I am seeking political power by inciting fear of a monster I know to be spurious.”

She smiled and kissed him while he erased the board. “I don’t think you’re doing anything wrong,” she said. She agreed that evasion of the mandate would not be a real problem. She also agreed fully with his decision to exploit the fear to help Maslak win the Presidency. “How would you like to spend the rest of the day?” she asked

“Alone, with you, cuddling and watching a comedy film.”

“I’d like that.”

Chapter 11

At first glance, the North Kyiv Ghetto of 1990 may have appeared to be home to homogeneous poverty. All buildings looked the same and nobody

walked around in fine clothes. Yet, at the center of the ghetto, on the lower floors of the *plattenbau* that surrounded the pillar council building, there were fine restaurants and stores selling televisions, air conditioners, silk, and cognac. Timur Sergev was careful about being seen there, but he spent his money more freely in the old city of Kyiv to his south. He wore the OST badge, but so did the wealthy Ukrainians who had risen through the margins of the Nazi caste system in force since 1941. Every other Sunday, he took trips there to deposit his money with the German banks, sometimes stopping to eat at the fine restaurants or buy German and English books.

At the same time, conditions in Siberia were deteriorating. In the rural Far East, Russian farmers were being evicted to make room for Chinese and Koreans. In Omsk, the oil industry brought more money but also more Germans, which meant more German police. With the oil industry came the same kind of labor violence that was occurring in North Kyiv, but with a more brutal response. In North Kyiv, individuals were taken to concentration camps; in Omsk, dozens of workers were shot in the city itself. In 1983 ninety were shot after an explosion that killed a German was blamed on sabotage. This was the worst reprisal since the “Manchurian massacre” and had a profound effect on Timur Sergev, who predicted accurately that the Omsk Russians would eventually be confined to a ghetto themselves.

Meanwhile, the Kripo’s increasing frustration with the corruption and incompetence of North Kyiv’s ghetto police led to a new experiment in ghetto governance. Rather than replace the pillar council with other North Kyivans, Omsk’s Russian council was asked to provide eight men(at this time, only men were allowed to serve on the councils) and Khabarovsk’s council four. Had this occurred earlier, the only volunteers would have been those who did so out of a sense of duty or felt they had no other option. But in 1990, Siberia’s Russians knew of the conditions in the ghettos, that they were poor but contained pockets of wealth. The previously deadly Nazi marches through the ghettos had become rare occurrences. Thus, on May 18, 1990, a special third-class train car left Omsk with about a hundred people, the eight councilmen and their families and assistants. When they arrived at the Sugenlar (then in a different location), they were met with a block of people esthetically welcoming the potential liberators. A President had not yet been elected, but it was expected to be Vladimir Usachyov. He had prepared a speech, legal at the time, which he gave to the excited populace gathered around the checkpoint. One of the spectators was Timur Sergev. He struggled to hear the speech but wasn’t impressed with what he could hear, commenting simply that it was “cliché.”

As the new rulers settled into their positions, they were mobbed by people wanting money, jobs, and influence over the new elite. One would have expected Timur Sergev to not be among them, keeping a low profile as always. But he saw that the situation was different. The new rulers were not in immediate need of money. What they wanted most was knowledge of this

strange new world and legitimization of their rule. Timur Sergev could share his knowledge with them; his wealth was proof that he wasn't just a talker. He befriended two men, Aleksandr Parshin and Pyotr Zimnyakov, who were mid-level advisors to Usachyov. They helped him get a job in the ghetto's construction department. The salary wasn't much, but it gave him an inside track to the ghetto's emerging elite.

After 1990, the ghetto began recovering from the effects of the DAB downturn. Some of the companies that succeeded DAB were quite profitable. Despite Nazi propaganda, it was whispered that the key to profitability was the employment of cheap, talented Russian labor. German engineers companies began to arrive, looking to exploit this opportunity. It is easy, in hindsight, to see why this happened in Kyiv rather than Germany or Siberia. The companies came to undercut German engineers, a politically dangerous project. Kyiv was "out of sight" yet not so far away from Germany as Omsk or Novosibirsk. Siberia was dominated by military men who tended toward a *dirigisme* model of economic development, while German cities had many entrenched rent-seeking elites. North Kyiv, run by civilian Gauleiters and without an entrenched German business class, provided room to experiment. German companies rarely employed Russians directly, instead contracting with Russian companies. These companies identified Russian talent throughout Siberia and among the Ukrainians and brought them to North Kyiv.

By the year 2000, nearly every single high-level employee of the North Kyiv pillar had been purged and replaced by those who migrated to the ghetto voluntarily after 1990. Many of the disempowered ghetto policemen feared vengeance. Some of the worst offenders were placed on trial by Usachyov, though the Kripo stepped in and prevented any punishment other than exile. This did not stop the fear of "extrajudicial punishment," and most high-level police leaders fled to Minsk. Timur Sergev cheered this and offered to testify against one man, though he doesn't say what, if anything, he witnessed. Yet his view of the new elites was not wholly positive. On the one hand, he was one of the few men among them to be there from the beginning and was popular at parties for this reason. But he couldn't help but notice many looked down on him for his proletarian background. He spent many pages of his diary agonizing over the question of how the new elite viewed him and how he should view the new elite. He often wrote using communist terminology but showed little enthusiasm for it, writing in several places that the whole way of thinking was outmoded. Yet it was what he grew up with, what he identified with in his youth, and he was too old to adopt a different worldview.

While he agonized about what he should think, there was no doubt about what he would do. He wanted his children to be part of that new elite. He wanted money and wanted connections, more than his job with the pillar could provide. He recognized that what the new elite wanted most was to build a "bubble" of the prewar world within the ghetto. Within the bubble

would be hotels, restaurants, bars, spas, parks, gardens, athletic clubs, museums, libraries, bookstores, theatres, malls, banks, travel agencies, charitable societies, and law courts. Some of this already existed in the ghetto, some would be built decades later, and some would never exist.

His first attempt was to create a high-end restaurant, managed by his wife. There were many talented chefs in Omsk and he put an ad in the city's German-language paper for a position in the ghetto. He got a favorable letter in response, and in 1994 he set out for the city, using his connections to get Usachyov to write him a "pass." This was the first time he left the Kyiv area, traveling in the same train car as many Germans. The trip was perilous, with police constantly interrogating him and demanding his "pass." When he arrived, he found the letter writer was an unqualified "moron." Nevertheless, he went back to Kyiv and opened the restaurant anyway. It quickly failed.

In the following year, he tried his luck selling books. He wrote without explanation that the one bookstore in the ghetto was a money-laundering scheme, so he needn't worry about competition. He had made many trips to a Ukrainian-owned bookstore in the old city and was friendly with the owner, Untilov Savelievich. They soon made a deal; Savelievich would help him order books from Germany and ship them to the ghetto. The bookstore was a success, but in 1997 Sergev decided to cut out the middleman. Savelievich claimed this violated the contract they had established and complained to the Kripo. Once again, Sergev was arrested and then released without explanation. This time he held firm and the Kripo refused Savelievich's further complaints. Savelievich then attempted to sue Sergev in the North Kyiv Ghetto court, which refused to hear the case.

Sergev's bookstore was never that great of a financial success, but it helped raise his profile to the point that in 2003 he was given a sinecure in the Education Department. After 2000 he stopped agonizing over his place in the elite and seemed to identify with it fully. His main priority was securing a comfortable life for his children. Oleg Sergev, born in 1976, tried and failed to replicate his father's success in the construction industry. Artem, born in 1979, helped found a successful insurance company. Ida, born in 1981, married into money. (Her father used the exact phrase.) Stepan, born in 1983, joined his brother's company though Artem thought he was an idiot. The last entry in Timur Sergev's diary was written by Artem on August 10, 2012, recording his father's death by heart attack. Timur Sergev's entries leading up to the point show a proud and contented man.

Toma Jansky stopped proofreading and thought about the descendants of the Sergev family. Artem's were part of the old money elite. Members of A.G. Club, according to their *Koppeln* pages. It was possible that they still had the diary as a family heirloom, having photocopied it before turning it over to the ghetto police. But assuming they didn't, what would they think of it? Probably they wouldn't think much of it at all. *He* wasn't that interested in his grandfather, but then his grandfather wasn't a very interesting man. He

remembered when his 8th-grade teacher told the class to write letters to their future selves, which he promised to deliver four years later. The assignment got an unusual degree of enthusiasm, including from Jansky. Yet when the letter was finally delivered, Jansky skimmed it and threw it in the trash with little thought.

Even if the Sergev descendants were interested in the diary, it would probably have little impact on their worldview. The fact that their ancestors cared about X would not be a reason for them to care about it. If they looked down on the working class, the fact that one ancestor was a communist would not be a reason to change their minds. They'd interpret it as proof the Russian "system" is meritocratic, that the deserving do rise. People's worldview tends to "freeze" in their early twenties. The past and the future are interpreted through the lens of that frozen worldview. So it was with Sergev the communist, so it is with Jansky. The diaries were certainly interesting to him, but they didn't really change his worldview. Some part of the middle class becomes the New Money. The New Money becomes the Old Money. That was what was important to him, that was what he was naturally drawn to in reading the diaries, and that was what was emphasized over and over in *Prison of the Nation*. Other aspects of the diarists' world, the prewar political system, the death of labor activism after 2000, criminality and conflict with the police, religiosity, the soldier's experience, and the "women's sphere" were comparatively short-changed. He noted this in the book's introduction. If he had more time to work on it, he planned to write more on the neglected areas.

For now, though, his interest had to be with the history he was living through. It had been two weeks since "May 12" and the party line seemed to have gone out. The mandate was a "temporary" measure designed to correct a "structural imbalance in the economy," namely, the low population of subhumans. After five to ten decades, a blink of an eye on the "racial-historical" timetable, the mandate would be rescinded. The media did not mention the contradiction between the mandate and the vision of Nazism outlined in *Mein Kampf* that Litzer referenced in his speech. The attitude seemed to be that this was an academic matter involving interest rates, "structural maladjustment," and all these big words. Fritz, Tommy, and Raj were expected to attend the rally in support of the mandate and then cease thinking about such a boring subject.

About the Russian reaction, Jansky was struck by the lack of dread. He thought at first that it was an artifact of him being in a bubble of people who were already subject to the July 11 mandate. But many of Nora's friends were not, and they, too, were not greatly saddened by it. The effect would be on their children, years in the future, and perhaps human brains are not attuned to phenomena that distant.

In any case, Toma Jansky had to go. There was to be an "open" Glanzia Forum meeting attended by selected non-members. The dress code was

strictly casual, but Jansky still looked over his orangish-red t-shirt and jeans to make sure there were no imperfections. He found none, shaved, smiled at himself in the mirror, and set off. Nora had already left to drop off the kids at the temporary daycare; she would meet him at the penthouse. The weather outside was very pleasant. In the days after May 12, it seemed like there were more people out and about, wandering around to “ponder their destiny.” Jansky considered that this might just be his imagination, a projection of the literary world into reality. Regardless, he didn’t feel it anymore.

The “normal” Glanzia meetings consisted of a “sermon” followed by smaller discussions in groups; “open” meetings were longer and consisted of schmoozing, sermoning, and then more schmoozing. Jansky arrived at 5:30 and found the front room of Maslak’s penthouse very crowded. He walked past it into the “main room,” which he found nearly filled to capacity. Jansky was surprised. Maslak had warned him there would be a “larger than usual number of guests” at the meeting. Jansky expected twenty; it seemed there were over a hundred. Though it did make sense. Maslak was a pillar councilman, and this wasn’t the time to pass up an opportunity to party with a pillar councilman. The most notable thing about the guests was how many were women, about one-third in Jansky’s estimation. Maslak always told people explicitly not to dress up. A few had ignored, or forgotten about, this advice. Jansky got only a few steps before a group of guests stopped him. One man reached out to shake his hand. “Toma Jansky, right,” he said.

The man wore jeans and a gray and white striped t-shirt, informal, but not dramatically so. He looked around sixty years old and was almost bald, with blond hair and green eyes. He had a tough-looking Nordic face and would have appeared intimidating if he was not about five feet four inches tall. The two men on his side were taller than him and about the same age. Jansky deduced from the mannerisms that he was the “leader.”

Jansky smiled. “Yes,” he said.

“I am Nil Chaban,” the man said.

Jansky was taken aback. Nil Chaban was a legend in the stock market in the late 2070s. Jansky knew this because others said so. He didn’t remember what exactly it was that Chaban did. “Pleased to meet you,” Jansky said. “I’ve heard a lot about you.”

“And I’ve heard a lot about you,” Chaban said in a tough but sincere voice.

Jansky knew from *How to Win Friends and Influence People* that he ought to talk about Chaban rather than himself. But he didn’t know Chaban’s claim to fame and didn’t want to reveal his ignorance by asking. “So,” Jansky said, “you’re a friend of Maslak’s?”

“A friend, yes,” Chaban scoffed.

Jansky briefly smiled.

Chaban smiled back. “Would you mind accompanying me to the art gallery? There’s a question I have about one of the paintings.”

“I’d be delighted,” Jansky said.

The four men walked to the art gallery. They joined three young men in admiring one painting, *The Stonk Market*. The painting featured a field with three trees flanked on both sides by two white-bricked walls that extended to infinity. Stock quotes were drawn on the walls’ individual bricks. Ghostly white images, faint outlines of people, looked to and fro throughout the field but were especially pronounced around the trees. At the bottom of the painting, overlooking the scene, was a hill upon which sat a man wearing a suit and an “OST” badge, sleeping or passed out.

Chaban looked to Jansky and then to the painting. “I wonder how this painting came to be,” Chaban said. “You see, I know the artist, Mr. Grudin, and he never paints anything like this.”

Jansky smiled. Subhumans were not allowed to export artwork even from one ghetto to another, so the paintings in the ghetto were all created by the same insular group, of whom Grudin was one of the most prominent members. “The style matches Grudin,” Jansky said. “The subject matter does not. The idea came from Ivan Vinov, who sketched it out.”

“Hmm,” Chaban said. “I always assumed the artist comes up with the idea and then does the painting. Perhaps others were commissioned in this way.”

“Perhaps,” Jansky said. “I don’t know too much about the world of art.”

“Nor do I, really,” Chaban said. “What does it all represent?” he asked as he gestured toward the painting.

“The scene is a trading floor. People used to gather around terminals to trade, thus the trees and the outlines of people around them. The “ghosts” represent the computer programs that have replaced real-life traders. The man on the hill is supposed to be monitoring the market but is not doing his job.”

“Is this ‘predicting’ anything?” Chaban asked in a cynical tone.

“It’s just a work of art,” Jansky said guardedly.

“Yeah, sure. But they’ve been saying these computer programs are all gonna wink out at the same time and there’s gonna be a recession. If it does happen, you could use this to say you predicted it.”

“I suppose you could,” Jansky said.

Jansky expected to start an argument, but Chaban just shrugged and gestured to Jansky to look at something else. They walked several paintings over to a map of the world as it existed in 1937.

“You know the Nazis love this map,” Chaban said. He pointed to Germany. “How small their country was. How their triumph can only be explained by their racial and ideological superiority. Do you think it was as David-and-Goliath as they say?”

“To some degree,” Jansky said. The diarists thought of the Nazi rise as a David-and-Goliath story, though Jansky couldn’t say so. “They do ignore some important advantages Germany had, going on about how they lacked this natural resource and that natural resource and ignoring their substantial coal endowment. But Hitler indeed faced second-rate statesmen. France could

have crushed Hitler in 1934, all by itself. Instead, it dithered, allowing him to take Austria and Czechoslovakia without firing a shot. When Britain and France decided to fight, America and Russia dithered. He was permitted to fight his enemies one by one, on terms he dictated.”

Chaban looked a bit surprised, perhaps expecting a more contrarian answer.

“I heard you were elected President of that Commission Linov set up,” Chaban said.

“No,” Jansky said. “I talked with Linov, and it was decided not to have a President due to the effects on public morale.”

Chaban laughed.

What had actually happened was that Linov called Jansky the day after the meeting and angrily said that he did not authorize the council to elect a President. Jansky responded by resigning from the “Presidency.” Linov snarled that one could not resign from a position he never legitimately held. Jansky stated calmly that he would cease to use the title, after which Linov hung up. He considered asking the council to re-elect him as “honorary President” but decided against it. Linov was making himself look petty. Jansky didn’t need to join in. Chaban, he hoped, was picking up on this.

“How is our president?” Chaban asked in a disdainful tone.

“I can’t really say anything about Linov, I am afraid,” Jansky said.

“But if the man was an excellent leader, with good instincts, you could say so without getting in trouble,” said Chaban matter-of-factly.

“Yuri Maslak knows him much better than I do,” Jansky said.

Chaban sneered, seeming to regard Maslak even more disdainfully than Linov. Without warning, he leaned over to Jansky’s ear. “A word of advice, son,” Chaban said. “Maslak is a mediocrity. If you want to keep climbing the ladder of power, I would advise you to keep him at arm’s length.”

“I’ll take that under advisement,” Jansky whispered.

Chaban leaned back and steadied himself. “Somehow, I don’t believe you will.”

Jansky was silent for a couple of seconds. “I can understand the skepticism,” he said plainly.

Chaban looked disappointed, perhaps expecting some other outcome from the conversation. “Well,” Chaban said, “I won’t keep you from your friends.”

“Good to meet you,” Jansky said.

The two amicably shook hands. Then Jansky turned around and walked away, looking for Nora. He thought about how he “performed” in the conversation. Badly, he decided. He did not ask Chaban any questions about himself. He failed to give him the chance to brag and act important. He realized he was simply exhausted from a long week of work. He found Nora and Ivan Vinov talking in the kitchen. With them were two forty-something women.

Jansky introduced himself and soon joined the group’s conversation. The

two women regaled them with the story of their visits to Berlin and spoke as if they took as if their level of wealth was not unusual in the slightest degree. Either they were old-money aristocrats or wanted people to think so. Very much not the usual demographic at the meetings, but they were in the majority, and it was natural conversations would be dominated by them. Next week will be back to normal, Jansky told himself.

The “meeting” officially began with a noise, “duh duh dah dah duh duh dah dah dah duh dah deh,” that came from Maslak’s speaker system. It was comedic, or perhaps sinister, depending on one’s mood. The two women were a bit startled until Vinov explained what it meant. The crowd began to gather in the dining room, where a larger than usual number of chairs had been assembled. The forty or so chairs could not seat everyone, and the majority would have to stand. Jansky predicted that many would drift into the neighboring rooms to sit elsewhere. Many would find the conversations boring in any case. Toma and Nora got some decaffeinated imitation coffee and sat in the front row, with him next to Lazar Orlov and her next to Soso Isayev.

The Americans have a pseudo-Germanism, *kirchlicherort*, “church-like-place,” which they use to refer to buildings of secular purpose that, whether intentionally or not, recreate the look and feel of the old churches. If Glanzia was an association of Americans, it might rent a *kirchlicherort*, perhaps with pews and a pulpit, high ceilings, and stained glass. One can find that environment comforting even if he is staunchly opposed to the supernatural claims of religion. But taxes are high, and Russians are poor, so Maslak’s penthouse must do. Sitting at the front in the central chair was Ivan Vinov, flanked by Kolov and Maslak. Maslak, wearing a black sweater, looked happy. Vinov, wearing a blue t-shirt, smiled but looked a bit nervous, perhaps intimidated by all the “normies.”

Once everyone had settled into their seats, Maslak stood up and put his hands out. Conversations instantly deadened. “My friends,” he said, smiling, “I know this has been a rough two weeks, and I hope you’ve all doing alright. I want to start by speaking about an unfortunate matter, the question of non-compliance with the productivization mandate. For obvious reasons, there will be no discussion of this subject here.” He smiled and paused for some seconds to allow the statement to sink in. Jansky knew the members were divided on the question of the “Bogeyman,” but he thought most understood that it weakened the “old money aristocracy” that most members hated. Critical thinking faculties should be directed elsewhere.

“Now,” Maslak said, “today we’re going to be discussing the Nazi system of higher education, for themselves and the Reich subjects. Ivan here will lead the discussion.”

Maslak sat down, and Vinov stood up. “Thank you,” Vinov said. He spoke in an unusually formal voice, mindful of the crowd of unfAMILIARS. “I will expound on the Nazi system of higher education and what purposes it

serves for the party, state, and subject pillars. I will start by telling the story of a man named Bruno Kraus. I always say to be suspicious of stories, so watch out. Kraus is born to a middle-class family in Styria, in the mountainous south of Germany. His mother is a stay-at-home mom. His father works at a state-owned enterprise, though he goes to his workplace only on special occasions. Our Bruno understands that he is richer than the large majority of the world's population. His neighborhood is purely German, but he sees many Blacks, Indians, Chinese, and Italians working as servants, drivers, nurses, and plumbers. He has heard of the hellish plantations of Africa and the nickel mines of Norilsk, but those distant places and that distant inequality are not quite real to him. What really triggers him emotionally is the difference in wealth and status between his neighborhood in Styria and those of the elites in Berlin. He resents them, but he knows he has a chance to become one of them. He knows that it's far harder for him to climb there than for them to stay there, but he's got a chance. Mainly he needs to study," Vinov said.

He then looked briefly across the room, then bent over and picked up his backpack. He took out a book and then stood up, holding it so the audience could see it. The book cover was plain red with "Admissions, 2091 edition" in silver lettering. It was wide but relatively thin. "This," Vinov said, "is the unofficial guide to elite university admissions for Germans. The party doesn't officially publish it, but everyone knows the score. There are no pictures, a few graphs, and many cartoonish illustrations. Overall the look and feel are like that of a children's book, as if it's not that serious a subject."

"There was one paragraph I bookmarked," Vinov said as he opened the book and turned to a page. By then, he looked quite comfortable, as if he had forgotten all the "guests" in the audience. "The admission committee is not merely choosing individuals who will study at an academic curriculum," Vinov said, reading the text. "It is choosing the future leaders of the Reich. Leadership ability is of supreme importance, which is why physical appearance is a factor." Vinov looked up and smiled. "Though if you believe the book, it seems to be a minor factor. Test scores are the most important thing. In addition, Bruno must participate in a sport and needs recommendations from two people, the principal and the local Hitler Youth leader. These two men will not submit recommendations for just anyone. If the candidate lacks the required test scores, they are instructed to refuse requests to write recommendations. But they can refuse to write no matter how strong the candidate is. They don't even need to face the boys they reject. They can simply mail in a letter that says they *don't* recommend this student. Bruno knows that the children of the elites can get others to vouch for them if they anger the Hitler Youth leader; for him, there is no alternative. He, and his father and brother, cannot do anything that pisses off the local elites. He must study, dress right, respect his elders, and stay out of trouble. The final step is an interview with a party official, as "provisional membership" is necessary for admittance. The book simply says: 'answer honestly.' We can't know

what questions candidates are asked, but since we haven't heard much about it, we can assume it's not *that* big of a hurdle. Probably they're filtering out homosexuals, the pathologically shy, and so on."

"Our Bruno gets in," Vinov said in a mockingly-triumphant voice. "He arrives at Chiemsee, home of the Advanced School of the N.S.D.A.P. He gets what is to him a massive stipend and has a good, leisurely time. Before, he had to study all the time, but now he finds he doesn't even need to show up for class. He spends most of his time playing golf and making friends. As far as he can tell, about half of his peers are sons of the existing elite who got in on that basis. About half are kids like him, who got in /meritocratically.' But some kids seem to blur this distinction. They are from elite backgrounds and are very bright. He knows it's taboo to speak openly of this distinction, but he maintains the mental category in the privacy of his mind. Gradually, though, it loses significance as he makes more and more friends from the elite classes. At first, he maintains an abstract resentment toward them, but as individuals, they're alright."

"He graduates with many options. He can go into business, managing some state-owned enterprise or, less often, a first-tier corporation. He decides he'd like to be Fuhrer. The easiest way there seems to be to go back to Styria and work for the party. He gets a job in the local party bureaucracy back in Styria, relatively low-paid and, by the standards of the elites, almost menial. His responsibilities are minimal. But it's known that so long as he isn't grossly incompetent, he will be promoted over the heads of his co-workers due to his credential. The banks know this and loan him money at low interest, so he enjoys a rich lifestyle despite his lowly job. Gradually he rises until he reaches a point where he's competing with others who share his credential. Promotion is no longer guaranteed. If he does well enough, he can be sent to Berlin as a "delegate" from Styria and from there can rise to lead the party."

Vinov paused for a brief moment. "As our Bruno is envisioning his rise to power, he ponders the functions of the elite university system. He's read *Mien Kampf*, *Myth of*, etc. There seems to be nothing in Nazism that would predispose it to use universities to choose its elites. After all, national socialism was supposed to be a workers' movement. But he sees the function that elite education serves. He realizes it has neutralized him, a man who could have been a dangerous revolutionary. It has given him an interest in preserving a system where his son will have a much easier time getting into an elite college than he did. It got him relatively young, when his outlook on the world could still change, and his ties to home were still weak. He compares it to the parliamentary system of old England. Then, local elites sent representatives to the capital. In the system of advanced university admissions, the local elites can do the same thing, but they cannot recall or otherwise control their "representatives."

"The system also serves to unify different factions of the elite. Rather than

the Navy man favoring his son in the Navy, the Army man doing likewise, and so on, the sons can use their fathers' positions to go wherever they are most interested. No bureaucracy has to worry about gaining a reputation for nepotism, for all are equally nepotistic since they've outsourced the job to the colleges. Another advantage is that competition to get into the elite occurs on a playing field where there will be little collateral damage. Bruno did not rise by leading men into war, attacking others in the party for incompetence or ideological deviation, or engaging in street activism, but by out-scoring and out-essaying other seventeen-year-olds."

"He starts to think about the Reich subjects, how they all have a similar system. Positions at the highest levels of the subject pillars and first-tier firms are given only to those with elite educations, *Thomas Wirth* for the Anglo-Americans, *Kothari* for the Indians, and so on. These universities, like the German ones, admit about half their students on a nepotistic basis and half on a meritocratic basis. Like the German universities, they theoretically control their own admissions. In practice, the Nazi Party runs the show. The system assures that 'new blood' flows into the Reich subject elites. The bright young American, like our Bruno, might resent his own elite, might think they are 'collaborators,' etc. But he knows he has a chance to join them, and once he does, he knows his interests lay in maintaining their hegemony and that of the Nazi system itself."

The conversation continued, with Vinov expounding on how the system of subject pillars may seem to have been centrally "designed" but in fact arose gradually, out of a dynamic and halting process. Read *Mein Kampf* and you will find nothing about "Reich subjects," no mention of "pillars." The first proto-pillar was the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, established in 1939. What wasn't said during the sermon was as notable as what was. Nobody asked about the Russian ghettos, why they don't have elite universities, how the elite high schools are similar and different. Perhaps they would discuss it the week after when the guests were not there.

After the sermon was over, the members and guests stood up once more and resumed talking in small groups. Jansky tried harder to express interest in the guests he met, allowing a fat man in a suit to go on about the effects of the productivization mandate on the real estate market. It was hard not to laugh at the man's obvious ignorance of economics, but Jansky managed to do so. At 8:30, Maslak announced the end of the party. Just as Jansky and his wife were preparing to leave, Ivan Vinov asked them to talk privately in Maslak's office. The couple agreed.

The three made their way through the throng of leaving people to Maslak's office. Jansky was surprised it was not locked and further surprised that Maslak was not there.

"You want to talk just the three of us?" Toma asked.

"Yeah," Vinov said.

Toma and Nora sat down on the red couch while Vinov closed the door

and then took the seat at Maslak's desk. He looked at the couple. "Well, that's over with," he said.

The two began to laugh, and Vinov joined it. Everyone knew what it meant.

"Has there ever been that many people at a Glanzia meeting?"

"Never," Vinov said. He looked to Jansky. "This really is something new," he said, pausing for a second. "But it's still temporary. None of those people are going to join us. A nice club to visit, but you wouldn't want to be a member there."

Toma and Nora chuckled.

"I wish I had your ability to charm those people," Vinov said.

"The situation's unfortunate," Toma said.

Vinov looked at Nora. "You know, before I founded Glanzia, before I met Maslak, I worked at the Institute for the Study of Higher Mathematics," Vinov said.

"No," replied Nora. She looked entirely sincere, though Toma knew she must be lying. He had told her himself.

Vinov turned to Toma Jansky. "Were you aware of that?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You were told I was ashamed of what happened, so should not be asked about it?" asked Vinov.

"Not really in those terms," Jansky said. In fact, Soso Isayev had used almost exactly those terms.

"It's true," Vinov said. "Would you like to hear the story?"

"Of course," Toma said.

Nora nodded.

"I was recruited by a man I met at A.F. Club. Short, with curly red hair, I don't remember the name. They paid for my travel to Stockholm, gave me what basically amounted to an IQ test. I never got further than Calc 2, but they saw potential. So they hired me as a 'secretary.' There were people from all over the world there, America, India, Japan. They would have hired a Congo Pygmy if they thought he could solve one of Hilbert's problems."

"How many people were there?" asked Nora.

"About 900. And 200 Russians. We wore business suits and worked at an ordinary office with ordinary cubicles. The Coffee machine was an old thing that often broke down. If you walked through it and didn't look closely, you would never think it was a mathematical institute. The floors above us, which housed the Reich subjects, were scarcely much better. It was a weird disconnect, our high pay compared to the austere working environment. Of course, the Germans at the top had a much posher environment."

"How long did you work there," Nora asked.

"Seven months. I spent the money I earned long ago."

"So why were you ultimately fired?" Toma asked.

"I always say that the party was in a fat-trimming mood at the time, which

is true. We were at the bottom of the totem pole, so we had to go. But that doesn't answer the question of why I, out of the many recent hires, was one of the nine to be laid off. I didn't suck up enough to Sima Maslow. It's as simple as that."

Jansky was a bit skeptical. Perhaps Vinov just wasn't as smart as the other mathematicians? But a part of him felt that it didn't matter. If that was the reality Vinov wanted to believe in, Jansky would believe in it too.

"At the very end," Vinov said, "when it was clear that I was to go, I appealed to one of the Germans who oversaw Maslow. I had, well, let's just say I had accurate information on Maslow that did not reflect well on him."

"How did the German respond?" asked Toma Jansky.

Vinov had a slightly pained look. "The following story I have only told to a very few. You must keep it secret, understand?"

They both nodded.

"I made my case, and he said, 'let's take a drive.' He didn't say where to and I didn't know what he meant, so I went along. As we were driving, he drove straight into what he told me was his neighborhood. I ask him, 'are you sure you want to do this,' reminding him that friendship between a German and a "subhuman" was a crime. He could get kicked out of the Nazi party. Worse things could happen to me. He said it was fine, kept driving, and I couldn't well jump out of the car. He said he wanted to show me something he told me I was always curious about but would never have the chance to see. It was amazing to see the size of the homes and the number of cars. I was surprised to see signage in Swedish alongside German, though, my German friend told me, the language would still die out. But what most amazed me was the cleanliness. I commented on this, and he compared it to an amusement park. I told him I wouldn't know as we aren't allowed in amusement parks. He asked if we had malls, and I said, yes, we do. It was somewhat like our poshest mall in the sense that everything was carefully sculpted and immaculately clean. The grass was cut to perfection, greener than it should have been, the shrubs all cut into cubes and spheres. It seemed artificial, like a Potemkin village, you think, 'oh, nobody can be actually *living here* or they'd muck it all up.' And, just like in our malls, you see the staff, men in dark blue and women in light blue. Usually, they were Africans who wore the 'N' badge. Sometimes they were Indians who didn't. Drive through the neighborhood and you get the visceral feeling of how much labor goes into these places. How much that could be used for the benefit of the many, wasted on the few."

"The workers must have that same sense," Nora said.

"Oh, sure," Vinov said. "The Indian in the rice paddy or textile mill knows that the Germans are richer than he is. But Germany is a distant intellectual abstraction. It's different when he moves to the Reich and works in the service sector, providing goods and services he knows he can't afford."

"Indeed," Toma said. "My uncle Igor would cite this movement of people

from agriculture and industry of the Global South to the service sector of the Reich as a reason to expect an imminent revolution. He's not smart enough to think it up, but he'd agree with someone who did."

"Yes," Vinov said. "Though when they move to Stockholm from India, the Indians establish themselves in a dominant, supervisory role over the local blacks. Even the stupider Indians have certain reserved jobs, taxi drivers and security guards, and so on, that the blacks cannot do. So that would complicate any 'revolution.'"

"What else did this head honcho German say?" Toma asked.

"He went on a lot about the 'structure of society' in Germany. How the party attempts to foster communitarianism and suppress individual identity. How they promote certain subcultures as "safety valves" for people at risk of finding themselves alienated from mainstream society, sportsball fandoms, sci-fi fandoms, and so on. How these groups are kept under strict surveillance by the party chancellery, how their publications must continually pound home the message that no matter how alienated we may feel from 'the normies,' the real enemy is external, the 'racial aliens' and their 'spiritually Jewish' lackeys. He seemed to think of this as something that should 'blow my mind.' I did pretend that my mind was blown."

"Did he think of himself as different from other 'Nazis?' An oppositionist of sorts?"

"I wouldn't go that far, but he certainly thought of himself as one of a very small number of Germans who 'knew the truth.' It's ironic that the Germans are more restricted in what they can say than we are, never quite knowing where the bounds of acceptable discourse are. And when they think up an idea they know to be *verboten*, they haven't heard it anywhere else, so think of it as their original, genius idea."

"Being a mathematician might have been part of it," Nora said. "They've won the IQ one-upmanship Olympics, so think that the social sciences must be child's play."

"Indeed," Vinov said. "The average German mathematician probably does have more insight into sociology than the average sociologist, but that's not saying much."

Nora and Toma laughed.

"So did the man drive to anywhere in particular?" Toma asked.

"No, just around the neighborhood," Vinov said. "Of course, it all worked out in the end," Vinov said with a look of insincere contentment. "The job I have now doesn't pay as much as I could have made had I become a senior mathematician, sorry 'assistant.' But I like it better." He looked to Toma Jansky in recognition of the secret project they both knew about but Nora didn't. Even if the most likely outcome was that the time capsule would be found 200 years later and destroyed to prevent discovery by the Kripo, was it not better to put one's mind to this task rather than make mathematical discoveries that would be credited to some German?

“The social sciences have always struck me as more interesting than mathematics, physics, chemistry,” Toma said. “I know that’s not a popular opinion among high-IQ people.”

Vinov and Nora nodded.

Jansky thought about why Vinov told him the story. Perhaps Maslak asked him to so that Jansky would feel close to his friends at the forum and less likely to jump ship for the New Friends he will meet on the Eugenics Board. But it was more likely that Vinov did it himself without being asked by Maslak and without being consciously aware of why he did it. One of the Club Members rises. The other club members gather around and celebrate him, clap and act super-friendly. They don’t consciously think they are doing so to keep the Rising Club Member from moving on from the club. It just seems like the natural, obvious thing to do.

“Do you guys think,” Vinov said, “that I’m a bad father, for working at the library, instead of trying to get a more highly-paid job?”

Vinov made about as much as the average web developer and made less than a “high-end” programmer. He could probably get one of those jobs if he really wanted them, though he’d have to fight for it.

“I think that’s a mindset that leads to dysgenic outcomes,” Nora said. “If people foresee that having children means one has the burden of providing the absolute best possible life for them, they won’t have them. And those who don’t care about being Great Parents will.”

Vinov smiled. “I’ve long agreed. Though that mode of thinking is increasingly out of date.”

“I suppose it is,” Nora said. “What does your wife think?”

Vinov shrugged and smiled as if the question was uninteresting and, in any case, unknowable.

Chapter 12

Toma Jansky sat at the rightmost of the eight seats in the 14th theatre box within the Harren Insurance theatre complex. The carpet, walls, and the curtains hanging in front of the box were slightly varying shades of red. The table in front of the eight seats, the door behind, and the ceiling above were all black. Faint, orange-tinted ceiling lights provided illumination. Sitting next to Jansky was Yuri Maslak. Over from him was Dylan Foster. One seat over was the “man in charge.” Henry Allen had blond hair, blue eyes, and a long red beard. He looked about thirty-five and had identified himself as a ‘redneck,’ an American term Jansky knew referred to a low-class person. Having a long beard was unusual for an American, though not taboo. He was a “Treasury Department officer.” The vague title was perhaps because he didn’t want to talk about his work. He was sitting in the theatre box and acted like he had paid for it, so clearly he had some high position. His wife sat next to him, as did one of his subordinates. Except for Allen’s wife, everyone wore a plain

black business suit. Everyone had also ordered food served by an American waiter. Jansky had an empty bowl of fried zucchini in front of him. Maslak had fried mozzarella sticks. The Americans all ordered champagne, though nobody had more than a glass.

The party was going full swing below. Maslak had a rule of thumb for telling whether the people were “politicians” (as he called subject pillar officials) or business people. The business people of the Kyiv Business Association were mostly business-*men*, and they usually didn’t bring their wives. “Politicians,” all of whom were men, did. The gender distribution was about sixty-forty male-female, so if the rule held, they were politicians in the main. A small minority were uniformed Kripo men.

At that moment, there was a knock on the door. Allen stood up and opened it, welcoming a man in. The man was dressed in the same black business suit as everyone and wore a blue tie. He looked around thirty, with short black hair and blue eyes. He reached his hand out to Maslak and briefly held it back, as if he didn’t initially see Maslak’s subhuman badge in the dim light of the box. A second later, he reached out again. Maslak reached out and they shook hands.

Allen looked toward Maslak, then at the man. “This Japanese delegation is here to learn about how we attract and keep the tech firms in our city,” Allen said, speaking in English-accented German. “I invited them because everyone knows the Russians are the backbone of the industry.”

Jansky briefly flinched at the verboten statement but forced himself to smile.

Maslak smiled warmly and shook the man’s hand. “I don’t know much about computers,” he said. “I am a member of the pillar council for the ghetto over there,” he said, pointing east toward the ghetto.

“Very interesting,” the man said. “The name’s Marvin Heckman. I am perhaps boring by comparison. I regulate the oil fields of Central Asia.”

Regulate the oil fields? What was it about the Americans and vague job titles? Were they trying to keep their distance from the “subhumans”? Or was it just their normal modus operandi?

“Well, we all need oil,” Maslak said.

“Yes we do,” Heckman said. He turned to Jansky and the two shook hands.

“My name is Toma Jansky. I work in finance, one of his employees,” Jansky said, looking to Foster, who he presumed was already familiar to Heckman.

“The best bright young man I’ve got,” Foster said.

Jansky’s only competition for that title was Maxim Semko, but he doubted Foster meant it as a backhanded compliment.

Heckman sat down and Allen turned to him. “You want anything to eat or drink? I can call the waiter,” Allen said, signaling to a small button at the center of the table.

“Yes, please.”

Allen pushed the button.

“So,” Heckman said, turning to Allen and Foster, “why are the Japanese here?” The tone seemed to indicate the stated reason, learning about the tech industry, was inadequate.

“They’re here to kowtow the tech companies, beg for them to set up offices in Danzig,” Allen said in a derisive tone of voice.

Danzig was the capital of West Prussia which, along with neighboring East Prussia, held the largest concentration of Japanese in the Reich. Rather than having a “pillar” as the Americans and Indians did, the Japanese had “consuls” overseeing their communities of “guest workers.” The names were different, but the principles of operation were the same. Danzig was ruled by a German Gauleiter, but the consuls oversaw areas where the Japanese were in the majority, just as Marcus Brecher was the unofficial “mayor” of Kyiv.

Heckman made a sneering face. “There’s something very disgusting about it,” he said. “It used to be that corporations lobbied the pillars. Now we lobby the corporations.”

“Yes, I see what you mean,” Allen said. “But you can look at it another way. They were on their feet because they were begging for subsidies. We don’t see that now because we no longer give out subsidies. The era of *dirigisme* is over. And when one of these businesses fails, no politician feels like it’s his white elephant on the ropes.”

Heckman smiled. “I suppose there is a bright side to everything,” he said. He looked toward Jansky and Maslak. “Do they know English?”

“No, I’m afraid,” Allen said. “If we want to include them in our conversation, we must speak German.”

He turned back to Maslak and Jansky and pulled out his chair to more easily face them. Maslak and Jansky did likewise.

“So,” Heckman said, looking to Maslak. “Do the Russians see you as a collaborator?”

Maslak smiled. “Some do, some don’t.”

“Do you see yourself as a collaborator?”

Maslak smiled. “It is my job,” he said. “I arrest those the Nazis order me to arrest. Indirectly, of course, the police do the dirty work.”

“But you’ve got no choice,” Heckman said in a friendly tone.

“That’s the case I make. But some of the lower-IQ segments of our population do not understand that. They seem to think that if I turned in my resignation, the Kripo would just throw up their hands and go back to Berlin.”

“I encounter similar problems in Central Asia,” Heckmann said cryptically.

“It reminds me of a saying,” Allen said. “I had no choice but to pull the trigger. That is the entirety of the social structure of the National Socialist state. The rest is commentary. Go now and learn it.”

Allen, Heckman, and Foster had smiles of recognition, while Maslak

looked confused.

"I keep hearing variations of that," Maslak said. "But I don't know what it refers to."

Jansky had heard it, too, from Juliet Perot.

"What about this one," Foster said. "If you do something different and you fail, you get blamed. If you do it by the book and it fails, you are forgiven. That is the entirety of modern management theory. The rest is commentary. Go now and learn it."

Everyone laughed. Heckman smiled and looked to Maslak and Jansky. "It comes from a quote from a Jewish Rabbi named Hillel. So you can see why they," he said, looking down to the audience, "don't want us to repeat it."

Of those in the audience, only a small minority were German. But no one could have any doubt about who Heckman was referring to. Jansky thought that he should logically be scared. It was paranoia to worry that the Kripo had bugged the bus, but the theatre box was another matter. But his emotional brain was not worried. Even if they had bugged the place, would they care? Nah. He had been warned many times about the hazards he'd find in the big bad world outside the ghetto. Nobody had warned him against being in the same room with high-up Americans who start cracking vaguely anti-Nazi jokes. Was it because it wasn't a danger? Because the Kripo didn't care? Or was it just that too few Russians had encountered the danger to make it a real concern? Regardless, he resolved not to join the conversation.

"The original quote from the Rabbi was as follows," Heckman said. "Someone asked him to sum up the *Torah* in one sentence. He responded with: 'that which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole *Torah*; the rest is the explanation; go now and learn it.'"

"A reasonable sentiment," Allen said.

"Though I'd point out," Foster said. "That when the Jews spoke of 'their fellow,' 'their neighbor,' they spoke only of their fellow Jews. We are cattle to be exploited; our societies undermined so that they can rule over us."

"Of course," Heckman said. "It's not like everyone hated them for nothing."

The mocking, humorous tone, Jansky thought, might betray real doubt about how much truth, if any, there was to the things the Nazis said about the Jews. Perhaps Heckman, Allen, and Foster thought it didn't matter. Even if everything the Nazis said about the Jews was true, it wouldn't justify the genocide. The Nazis were hardly the first regime to engage in genocide. The Turks had conducted a similar massacre during the First World War. But the Nazis were the first to make their crimes central to their national mythology, forcing government and business elites to express barely veiled approval of it. Jansky hypothesized that they used it in this way precisely because it was so outrageous. Every man in the government had to express support for it, to knock him off his moral high horse, remind him of his powerlessness, his impotence in the face of the system.

“I’ve got one about the Jewish thing,” Heckman began. He was interrupted by the German word “attention” emanating from the theatre. Everyone looked toward the stage, where a man was walking up to the podium. The lights on the theatre’s ceiling began to darken, and the screen behind the stage lit up with an image of the man walking to the podium. Jansky was jolted. He didn’t know the Gauleiter was to be there. The obese Gauleiter walked to the podium slowly, as if it was an uphill battle. This was the first time Jansky had seen Adolf Hahn in the flesh, though he had seen him many times on the television. Hahn was a short forty-something with thick black hair and a quite ugly face. He always conducted himself in what seemed to Jansky to be a harsh and slovenly manner. He was known to get angry at the softball questions the state media put to him in interviews. Jansky would bet that he was an embarrassment in the Reich, sent to Kyiv as some type of internal exile. Despite Jansky’s glee in mocking the man’s physical appearance, he reminded himself not to put too much stock in appearance as a window into character. Hahn’s predecessor, Ludwig Söder, was very handsome. During interviews, he conducted himself in a warm and friendly manner. He seemed like the kind of man always eager to give candy to children, help older women onto the bus, and make sure everyone feels happy, comfortable, included. And then he would speak in glowing tones about the execution of a Russian man accused of sex with an American woman.

“I am proud,” Hahn said, after finally reaching the podium, “to introduce my friend, the Japanese Consul for West Prussia, Ohashi Hanako.” He reached out for Hanako and waited as the man walked slowly to the podium, looking back and forth at the audience. As Hanako stepped onto the podium, Hahn shook his hand, then turned and waved. He then turned around and walked off the stage. Hanako turned toward the audience and waited for Hahn to exit. Hanako looked about fifty, with a full head of black hair and a mustache. He wore a black suit with a black and white striped tie. He was overweight, though not as much as Hahn. The majority of the “Japanese” in the Reich were ethnically Taiwanese or Korean, but the high-ranking Hanako was probably a “blood-Japanese.”

“My friends,” Hanako said. “I have come here today in the spirit of international friendship and cooperation as a representative of the Japanese community of West Prussia and the Japanese people as a whole. Under the leadership of the Fuhrer of the Greater Germanic Reich, Hans Litzer, the peoples of the world have made great strides toward ensuring a life of peace, prosperity, and harmony for all of our peoples. Homelessness is unknown, illiteracy has been vanquished, and pollution is increasingly a thing of the past! We have made great progress in all areas of science. The voyages to Mars and Jupiter, the many successful treatments for what were thought to be untreatable diseases, and the reduction in the cost of whole-genome sequencing to just a few hundred Weltmarks are just a few of the many advances that have only been possible because we have set aside our

differences to pursue collective well-being.”

Hanako paused, and the audience, knowing the ritual well, began to clap. After it died down, Hanako resumed. “Our peoples have waged a ruthless campaign against criminals and subversives, aided by the latest advances in security cameras and DNA profiling. No longer can degenerates hope to hide in the shadows and then run away to another jurisdiction to escape justice. Never before have our streets been so safe for our women, children, and elderly people. The cultural poison of Jewry has been eliminated. The subhumans are under strict control.”

Hanako spoke in a way that was enthusiastic yet obviously acted. This was how the Nazis liked it; speeches weren’t supposed to sound sincere. To the uninitiated, it might seem like the outsider Hanako was disrespecting his audience, lecturing the Americans and Indians on how to be real national socialists. But they expected it; it was the tradition. Jansky had heard the speech before, and would undoubtedly hear it again, so began to tune it out. After a few minutes, the waiter arrived and showed Heckman the menu. Heckman whispered the order, and the waiter left.

Who was Ohashi Hanako? Jansky knew little about Japanese culture. In the ghetto, to say something was “Japanese” was to say it was inscrutable, alien. But he didn’t need to know much to understand Ohashi Hanako. For he was part of a Japanese elite that was gradually merging with other non-German elites into one global elite community. German, which Hanako spoke perfectly, was its common language. Its curriculum was “internationally aligned.” Soccer was its common sport. News came through the Reich Wire Service, and while they do translate it into local languages, the global elite preferred to read the original German. The elite man’s “World-Marks” were invested in international stonk funds. “Trade deals,” “press agreements,” and “disarmament treaties” meant that there was less and less difference between the French and Japanese with their “independence” and the American and Indian “Reich subjects.” All were defined by their dependence on and obedience to the Nazi hegemon.

There were, of course, some barriers between Hanako and his audience. He would never marry an American or Indian. He’d lose his job and his “mongrel children” wouldn’t be able to get into *Todai*. But the Nazi prohibition against mixed marriage was ultimately a minor inconvenience, a show of loyalty the global elite community provided to the Germans that, from their perspective, was easily worth it.

At the other end of Reich subject society, among people like the waiter who served Jansky his fried zucchini, a different kind of merger was happening. It was biological as well as cultural. The English truck driver and Mexican nurse saw little disadvantage to intermarriage. Mexico and England were very different. The Mexican and English first-generation migrants to the Reich were very different. But the second generation, born in the Reich, found that they worked the same jobs, listened to the same music, drank the same

beer, and were forced to contribute to the same Unified Pension Fund. Intermarriage caused some problems receiving money from the ethnically based winter-aid organizations, but that was all. What would be the long-term future as intermarriage continued? Jansky didn't know, but he doubted the Nazis would lose much sleep over it. They'd find a way to turn it to their advantage. They always did.

Jansky turned back to attention when Hanako changed the topic of his speech. "It was sometimes thought," Hanako said, "that technological development would mean an elimination of distance. If anything, the opposite has occurred, and it is more important for a firm to be physically close to its market. An agricultural or industrial good can be packaged and shipped. Services are not so simple. While agriculture and natural resource extraction must and will remain globalized, the majority of value-add is now in the service sector. Given the fact that our world is underpopulated, efficiency demands the concentration of this service sector activity in one area. For historical and economic reasons, it can only be the North European plain. There are many young people in Japan who know this, even if they do not understand the economic mechanisms. They want to migrate to the *Reich*. But to do this, the political infrastructure must be in place for them to reach their true potential. That is why my delegation is here. Our community can learn a lot from Greater Kyiv. We do not seek buzzwords, cliches, or easy, symbolic steps. We know that fostering a pro-business environment conducive to many thriving technology companies requires many hard decisions. Our delegation is here to listen to the hard truth."

Translated into plain language, Hanako's point was this. The Germans have exploited the world and have seized the lion's share of its wealth. It is easier to get back the crumbs if you're right next door to them, in Germany itself. But some problem is interfering with the migration. The Germans are either restricting migration directly or doing so indirectly via construction restrictions. Ideally, Hanako would like help solving the problem. But if it proved insoluble, his goals could still be accomplished by the *perception* that the Serious People in the government will solve the problem.

Hanako continued his speech, praising Kyiv and emphasizing how humble his people were, coming to Kyiv to seek help from the experts. He finished it up with the standard ritual.

"Seig Heil," he yelled, his left hand raised into the air.

In seconds the crowd was cheering. Male or female, American, Indian, German, or Japanese, everyone was giving the salute and yelling the chant. Everyone except for Yuri Maslak and Toma Jansky.

After about two dozen cries, Hanako turned and walked away from the podium, ending the chanting. A second later, the Horst Wessel song began emanating from all directions and the audience below, which had previously stood still, began to move around. At that moment, there was a knock on the door, and the waiter brought Heckman a basket of chicken tenders.

"Well," said Heckman. "Now that I have my food, I suppose there's no reason to stay here any longer."

"I agree," Allen said. "You want to go to Henry's?"

"They can come?" Heckman asked, eying Maslak and Jansky.

"Yeah, pretty much everywhere except for the Meier Club and the foyer is accessible to them," Allen said.

"Splendid," Heckman said, sounding surprised and happy to hear it.

They walked out of the box and then through the hall, where there was a lively scene with people talking in small groups. They went up the stairwell, reached the fourth floor, and then walked into Henry's Bar. The scene was loud, with lots of unintelligible English words. Henry's had about a dozen pool tables, a few more parlor games, some ancient arcade consoles, a series of chairs and couches, and a large bar with a dizzying selection of alcohol. Hanging from the ceiling was a special lighting system that could emit a variety of colors; that evening it was set to green. The bar was full, but not so much that there was no room for them, and they waded cautiously through the various groups, with Allen in the lead and Maslak and Jansky at the back following. Allen seemed to be looking for someone.

As the group waded through the crowd, Jansky noted that Allen and Heckman seemed very happy, like the bar was their natural stomping ground. Foster seemed less so; he struck Jansky as more of a golf-course type of person. Maslak looked happy and comfortable, as he was the kind of person who could thrive in any environment. Jansky hoped he looked like he was having a good time, though the scene was actually giving him the creeps. He had been in the bar once before, but it was midday and the lights were on. What if someone saw Jansky's OST badge and screamed? Or quietly reported him to the guards? The guards knew there was a small list of "permitted" subhumans immune to the "unwritten rules." But might the list be better preserved if complaints were minimized? But Maslak didn't think to make that complaint, so Jansky wouldn't either. He thought about how the others would react as they saw the group. Allen, Heckman, and Foster were wholly typical, but what of these OST badges? Yuri Maslak, short, fat, and not very handsome, resembled the typical subhuman of Nazi propaganda. *What's that character doing here?* Jansky imagined them thinking.

As for Jansky himself, he resembled a different type. The Russian on-screen is invariably short, ugly, and slovenly, whether he is the central character or background decoration. The only exception was a genre of slasher films that featured a Russian who takes off his badge to go murder and rape, sometimes wearing a Nazi uniform and speaking perfect German. Often he is young and handsome. The Nazis did not allow these films to be imported into the ghetto, but Jansky had seen a few smuggled films and found it hard not to root for the slasher. He smiled at the thought that people may map him onto the slasher, his OST badge glowing eerily in the pale green light. He'll sink his knife into you and disappear into the dark!

Jansky smiled, this time genuinely, as he fantasized about it. He knew it wasn't likely. Most in the room were Americans who were local to the area. They knew of the disconnect between the Russians of reality and those on TV. If they noticed Jansky at all, they'd think he was some American's pet lackey. In a way, he was. He realized that his feeling of alienation was not just a matter of him being an OST badge in a sea of Americans. The scene reminded him of his own experiences in the smaller, less posh bars of the ghetto. The memories were not pleasant ones. He thought back to the Eugene Weimann film *Delimiter*, about a man in 2092 who travels back to the 2060s. He gets his young man's body back, goes to a bar, and then remembers that contrary to the stories he told, he never had any success there. He feels sick to his stomach and goes outside for air.

He had watched the film with Nora. Both saw that it was Nazi propaganda intended to demonize "bar culture" and promote traditional marriage. Neither came into the film needing convincing. Nora declared that the film wouldn't resonate with anyone. He hadn't felt like sharing that it resonated with *him*. Later he watched the commentary track, where Weimann expressed frustration that the ignorant masses did not grasp the significance of the scene. What they took away was that "time machines cause sickness." It seems most people are too stupid to grasp anything more subtle than "EVERY WATT OF ELECTRICITY WASTED IS A VICTORY FOR THE JEWS!" No wonder Nazi propaganda is so crude!

The bar, Weimann said, is understood to code for "the past." The bar aesthetic is timeless; except for the music, nothing changes. For most around Jansky, like Weimann's protagonist before he used the time machine, the bar brought back pleasant memories. Some were remembering a fantasy, though at least a few really did have fun there. Juliet Perot had told him there were three types of bar, one for young singles who pretend to be happy, another for older people who are frank about their unhappiness, and a third for older people who want to pretend to be happy and youthful. Her club was the first type. Henry's was the third.

Finally, they came to a group of East Asians. Allen seemed to know an older East Asian man, and they leaned toward one another and spoke too softly for Jansky to hear. Soon they began speaking louder about how they had last seen one another in Berlin. The Asian man confirmed they were part of the Japanese delegation. For a while, the "low ranking" group members were silent, but they soon began to break off into groups and start various conversations. Jansky gravitated toward a young East Asian man, who briefly pulled back when he noticed the OST badge. But a second later, the man reached out his hand.

"Hello," the man said. "My name is Adachi Katsuo. I'm a lawyer." Katsuo was short, light-skinned, and had a slight beard.

"Pleased to meet you," Jansky said as he shook the man's hand. "I am Toma Jansky. I am a financial analyst and a member of my ghetto's eugenics

board.”

Katsuo nodded. “Pleased to meet you,” he said in a not-too-sincere voice.

“So, how is the lawyering profession?”

Katsuo looked a bit ill at ease but then shrugged. “I doubt you’ll understand.”

“Yeah, probably not,” Jansky said.

“So, how are the brothels here?” Katsuo asked.

Jansky was taken aback by the question. “I wouldn’t know.”

Katsuo smiled skeptically. “They don’t have brothels in the ghetto too?”

“They do, but I’ve never had any interest.”

Katsuo smiled. “Well, you must encounter women wearing the face tattoo?”

Most Russian ghettos outside Germany forced prostitutes to get a special tattoo, the theory being that they were free to work as prostitutes but not to lie to men about it. This was not the case in Germany, and Jansky supposed that the phenomenon had been mythologized there. “Yes, I see them on the bus or in the supermarket on occasion. But they are less than one out of a thousand women.”

“That is only the official number.”

Jansky nodded.

“I have been told that Russian men seek out women who have never worked outside the ghetto. After all, a maid or a secretary can be a whore just the same.”

“There is some truth to that, yes,” Jansky said. *And I have heard there are professions your men look at in a similar way*, he thought but did not say.

“I have heard that the supply of new prostitution licenses for women under the relevant age has been suspended due to the productivization mandate,” Katsuo said. He spoke as if it were a subject where all claims were inherently unreliable, including those he would hear from Jansky.

Jansky was surprised that Katsuo knew this information and wondered if he had learned it at a brothel. “Yes,” Jansky said, “while we await instruction from Berlin, the licensing process has been suspended.”

“And Berlin is okay with this?”

“Yes,” Jansky said. It was reasonable to suppose that ‘Berlin’ knew and was okay with it, but he didn’t know for sure. Savel hadn’t said much when he reported on it during the Eugenics Board meeting. He was almost embarrassed he had to discuss the subject at all.

“Would Berlin have been okay with this had you suspended new licenses a year ago?”

“I wouldn’t know,” Jansky said. “The ghetto police are in charge of that particular aspect of life. They have not told me a great deal.”

“But I am sure you have your hypotheses?”

“I guess. Do you have hypotheses?”

Katsuo looked slightly angered but then forced himself to smile. “Sure I

do. For instance, I wonder if you lobby the Kripo to increase the excise tax on prostitution. So that your women find it less attractive as a career path?" Katsuo smiled as he said it.

Jansky pointed to his OST badge. "Lobbying is not a job we are permitted to engage in."

"Then why are you here?"

"Sometimes people have questions for us, as you do here. Our perspectives can be requested."

"It never occurs to you to use the opportunity to pursue your own goals?"

I wouldn't tell you about it if it did, Jansky thought. "The excise tax on prostitution is set from Berlin. We'd have to go there to affect it."

Katsuo frowned slightly. "The centralization of the Reich is overrated. Many decisions are made in Munich, Essen, or Nuremberg. But I do see your point. The Americans are certainly a funny bunch, allowing you to be here."

"Is that right," Jansky said in a disinterested voice.

"Of course. You know Moscow, I am sure. Do the Chinese there allow you to prance around as equals?"

"From what I've heard, they do not," Jansky said.

"No," Katsuo said.

"I take it you prefer the Chinese way," Jansky said.

"Eh, when in Rome, you do as the Romans do."

Jansky nodded.

"I have heard that the Russians believe it is a historical accident that they must wear that badge," Katsuo said, looking toward's Jansky OST badge.

"To some extent, Russians do believe that," Jansky said.

"What about you?"

"I've never been particularly interested in history. More of a math and computer guy," Jansky said.

Katsuo laughed heavily for some time. "That's good. I've got to tell this story," he said, still half-laughing. When he regained his composure, he resumed. "I fully understand why you are not interested in history. The history of your people is a history of failure, after all." Katsuo paused to give Jansky a chance to rebut the point. Jansky did not do so.

"You had the richest land in all of Eurasia," Katsuo said. "You made a desert out of it. In 1917 you believed the lies of the Jews. We came in a year later and offered to help liberate you from Jewry, but you told us you preferred it. For twenty years, you callowly submitted to Jewry, suffered starvation, murder, deportation to Siberia, until Hitler came. Hitler did not enslave you. You chose slavery to Jewry. He merely replaced Jewry as your master."

Jansky was quiet for some time, looking plainly at Katsuo. A thirty-something Japanese man to Jansky's left, who was heavier and had relatively long hair, looked amusingly at Jansky, having ceased talking to Heckmann, who awkwardly walked away. Nobody else was paying attention to the

“debate,” though, certainly, some had heard it. “As I said, I have never been particularly interested in history,” Jansky said,

“What about the future?”

“What about it,” Jansky said, feigning confusion.

“The long-term future of your race,” Katsuo said. “As technology advances, human labor becomes obsolescent. Robots replace workers all over. But the demand for Russian whores will only increase as the world gets richer. It would make a great setting for a novel, don’t you think? When the ghetto is a giant whorehouse, imagine being a ghetto policeman, telling yourself you and your non-whore wife are better than them. Some would say that is already the case today.”

“You should write it,” Jansky said.

“I want to hear what you really think, Mr. Jansky,” Katsuo said in a forceful voice.

Jansky felt a shiver down his spine. He knew he ought not anger Katsuo lest he complain. A single incident could have him banned for life from the KBA. “The technological obsolescence of human labor story is overrated,” Jansky said. “Demand for labor, including unskilled labor, is still high. It will be quite a while before your story ever comes true. I strongly doubt either of us will live to see it.”

Katsuo was confused, unsure of how to respond. The plump man to Jansky’s left then interjected. “You are a skeptic of this artificial intelligence revolution, I take it,” the plump man said.

“Yes,” Jansky said. “A machine can tell you whether an image is of a dog or a cat—big whop. Ask yourself how many jobs have been made obsolete by it. That’s the real measure.”

Katsuo rolled his eyes and took the opportunity to walk away. Jansky was about to ask the plump man his name when an older man, who Jansky would have guessed was the most senior in the group, walked up to him and extended his hand. Jansky reached forward and shook it.

“I apologize for my colleague back there. He has a way of saying things that are better left unsaid,” the man said.

Jansky noted that the man wasn’t disagreeing with anything Katsuo had said, just noted that it was rude to say it. “It is no problem,” Jansky said. “I like to think I have a thick skin.”

“Good,” the man said. “My name is Katayama Hitomi.”

“Toma Jansky.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Hitomi said. Hitomi looked about forty years old and was short and light-skinned, with short hair, a slight mustache, and round glasses. He spoke perfect, unaccented German yet spoke slowly as if German was not a native language. There were still parts of Asia where the education system, the radio, and the television are entirely “native,” and even German TV shows are dubbed into the local language. At that point, the plump man turned around and walked away, leaving the two of them to converse.

"It's funny," Hitomi said. "You are the whole reason why we're here."

Jansky was briefly confused before he deduced what the man meant.

"I mean, not you specifically, but the Russians in general. We would like to build a second Russian ghetto in Danzig," Hitomi said.

"I take it there are challenges?"

"Yes," Hitomi said. "We already have the borders decided on. We want to buy; sellers want to sell. But we are having some trouble with *political opposition*."

Jansky was surprised, not by what Hitomi said but by the fact that he had shared it with an OST badge. Political opposition, no doubt, was a code phrase for local Germans. "And you wonder if the Americans can share any insight?"

Hitomi nodded. "I had thought the Americans would share my desire and would be working on establishing more ghettos here, too. I have learned that this is not the case."

Jansky nodded. "The Americans like the area the way it is. They want the rural areas to remain rural," he said. Left unsaid was that "the Americans" were really "the American elites." No one asked for the common man's opinion. He wondered how many trips could be saved if people could have free discussions on the internet. It wasn't like you'd be punished for wanting or not wanting more ghettos in your city. Both were perfectly acceptable opinions. But debate them over the net? No way.

"I am surprised at the sentimentality," Hitomi said, carefully sounding out his words. He bent forward and Jansky did so as well. Hitomi whispered in Jansky's ear. "Don't the Americans refer to this as their 'Babylonian captivity'?"

Jansky smiled. The Nazis hate Biblical analogies. It wasn't like using them made one a Christian, but it was close enough for Nazi discomfort. "I have not heard that," he whispered falsely. He then bent his head back. "But I do understand the sentiment," he said. "For the elites who were born here, this is their home. America is a distant memory."

"So where do you think the excess population of, uh, 'subhumans' will end up going?"

"The wide-open spaces north and east," Jansky said. "The Chinese in Moscow are recent migrants, there to make money, and are not sentimental about the place, though they may be so in thirty years."

"So Russians returning to what used to be called Russia?"

"Yes," Jansky said.

"Poetic, perhaps," Hitomi said with a very slight smile. Jansky got the feeling he would laugh except that his personality was too 'serious' to allow it.

Jansky nodded.

"I had hoped that the productivization mandate would help get things moving," Hitomi said. "Litzen wants more Russians, and they must live

somewhere. But nobody sent a memo to local officials telling them they must play a role in this grand project.”

“That’s unfortunate. On our end, too, we are still waiting for information about details of the mandate.”

Hitomi nodded but did not seem interested in what those details were. “I have been trying to do this for four years,” he said in a tone barely above a whisper. “And I still don’t know who is really in control. Go to the Gauleiter, and I am told it’s the party congress, go to the party congress, and I am told that it’s the zoning commission, go to the zoning commission, and I am told it’s the Gauleiter, go back to the Gauleiter and I am told I must go to Berlin.”

“The ghetto’s governance involves similar frustrations with unclear authority,” Jansky said.

“A human universal, perhaps?”

Jansky nodded.

Chapter 13

There were fourteen tables at the November Fundraiser for the Popular Association of the North Kyiv Ghetto; each could seat ten people. At the table with Toma Jansky was Nora, Yuri Maslak, his wife Anna, Koloda Sorokin, his wife Sveta, two more men who were friends of Maslak, Stepan Tereza and Dernov Stella, and their wives. At the other tables was a “who’s who” of “notables and their wives.” Seven out of the twelve council members were in attendance, as was Anton Linov, who sat at a table with his wife, personal lawyer, and some other men in suits and women in dresses. His son and daughter were absent. Under-18s were not allowed to attend the fundraiser, though Jansky saw a few who looked suspiciously young.

It had been six months since the extension of the productivization mandate. Two months prior, Toma Jansky had become the father of Ivan Jansky, named after Ivan Vinov. He had met with more and more notables, people Maslak, Sorokin, Boyko, and Bondar had introduced him to. He then lent his credibility to the “Bogeyman.” But he only spoke about it to individuals and small groups. His speech to the fundraiser was to be the first time he would refer to it “publicly.” He had asked Maslak if it might be better to do so in some environment other than a charitable fundraiser. After all, don’t people just want to sit back, eat, and feel good about themselves? No, Maslak had said. There will not be another chance to speak in front of so many notables and it was “too important” to worry about “etiquette.” The “facts must be said.” And he would say them. He wouldn’t refer to Linov’s rule directly and half of the audience, particularly the wives less involved with “politics,” would not see it as an attack on the man. But Anton Linov certainly would.

The general environment was relaxed and happy. Chandeliers hung from the ceiling, artwork hung from the walls, and the waiters behaved in the exaggeratedly deferential manner that Jansky would have sneered at as a child but found much more pleasing when he was the one being waited on. Most were dressed semi-formally; Jansky wore his black business suit with no tie. The food was quite good: chicken with gravy and stuffing, mashed potatoes, chopped carrots, and cherry pie. Everyone else at the table had a glass of wine; Jansky didn’t, as he wanted to be of completely sound mind for the speech he was to give. For most, this was the winter celebration, a break from the stress of normal life. For Toma Jansky, this would be one of the most stressful moments of his life. He hoped it didn’t show.

He thought about how the winter celebration differed across time, culture, and class. In the diarists’ time, Christmas was the major wintertime celebration, though some devoted communists still celebrated the secularized “New Year’s.” The Nazis wanted to eliminate the celebration of Christmas among all the Christian peoples, even the Russians. They didn’t have the

manpower to search every house for Christmas decorations, but they could force the ethnically-based Winter Aid organizations to distribute toys to children on the first Sunday of December, “Winter Aid Day.” Wealthier kids who didn’t receive anything from the Winter Aid were given presents by their parents on Christmas Day. Inevitably they complained that other kids got gifts before they did. The parental will was gradually worn down over time. Across class and ethnicity, Winter Aid Day became the central winter holiday. Some Russians still celebrate the minor holiday of Christmas with drinking and discussions of Russian history.

For poor Russians, the main event of Winter Aid Day was the first Sunday of December when they received their box of goodies and payments to their bank accounts. Richer families buy toys for their children and give them out on the same day. During the lead-up, they might give a little to the Winter Aid and donate old stuff to the pillar-run dime store. For the rich, events like the PA November Fundraiser were a major part of the seasonal ritual. If you did not attend, you’d be marked as a miser, an embarrassment to your class. You’d need to explain that he was having temporary financial trouble and would be expected to be particularly generous the following year. If you didn’t, you’d find yourself increasingly shut out of your class’s social world. Every year volunteers design special Winter Aid donor badges, which the ghetto’s metal shops fabricate for free. Yuri and Anna Maslak had donated 80,000 WM, and each wore the “80 Badge.” It was brass and was about the same size as the *OST* badges, showing “80,000 WM,” “2096,” “WHW”(short for the German word *Winterhilfswerk*), and the face of a young boy confidently looking toward the sky. Other badges showed books, loaves of bread, fish, and hands clapping.

Jansky wore no badge, for all he and his wife had done was buy tickets to the dinner, costing 4,000 WM each. But that was no small thing and he hoped it would signal that he wasn’t just some middle-class kid looking to make a buck telling stories to the bigwigs. He had publicly shown affection toward his wife specifically to alert passersby to the fact that the Jansky family had bought two tickets. At the end of the dinner, the waiters would come around and collect last year’s badges to be given back to the metal shops and melted down. Those less elite than Jansky would give back their badges in less illustrious events, with lower-quality food and a more cramped “gala room.”

Jansky sensed that a traveler from another dimension might think the whole ritual bizarre and contrived. But to him, it did not feel fake. It induced a warm, heartening, hopeful feeling. Sure, the motivations for donating were not entirely pure. People wanted to impress their friends. The old money wanted to prove it was more generous than the “garish” new money; the new money wanted to disprove that allegation. A cynic would note that part of the day’s “donations” would pay for the event itself. The paintings on the walls had been donated, but Jansky doubted that the waiters were working for free. Avoiding criticism of this was one reason the PA was organizationally

separate from the pillar-run Winter Aid, to which it directed all of its funds. But Jansky wouldn't advocate doing away with the ritual. The amount donated by the ghetto's elites would be far lower without it. It transformed the zero-sum intra-elite status game into a positive-sum game that benefitted the poor.

Jansky had not written down the speech he planned to give but wrote some "bullet points" and went over the speech in his head many times, careful to avoid Germanisms and Anglicisms. He had some "practice runs" with Maslak, who, to his surprise, told him he didn't need to "dumb it down." That he could use phrases like "carrying capacity" even though half the audience would not understand them. The dullards would not be paying attention in any case and the smart people wanted to hear a smart speech. Jansky was initially concerned that the speech had nothing to do with the Winter Aid. Maslak said this would be fully expected and desirable. No matter how much people donated, there would still be a feeling they could give more, so they didn't want to be reminded that the ghetto's working-class needed winter coats, cleaning supplies, books, and medical treatment. The most important thing was that Jansky would not mention the Bogeyman until the very end, lest he look like a one-trick pony with no other ideas. It had to look like he didn't *want* to say it but was saying it because he felt the alternative of doing nothing to confront the Bogeyman would be ignoble and cowardly. Nor would he brag about how he predicted the expansion of the productivization mandate. Everyone had heard that he did, even if some did not believe it. He'd talk about the mandate, but in "historical perspective," comparing current conditions to those of 1800. The speech would be somewhat like those given by Hans Litzer and Michael Schwab; a man increasingly talked about as Litzer's successor. But his speech would be better.

When Jansky, Sorokin, and Maslak had finished eating, the group began to converse. Stepan Tereza looked to Jansky. "So," he said, "I heard you spoke to some members of a Japanese pillar delegation earlier this summer?"

Jansky nodded.

"What did they say?"

"Mostly wanted to know about the Americans here, their culture and attitudes toward zoning law. One man whispered in my ear and asked if it was true that the Americans regard Kyiv as their "Babylonian Captivity."

Tereza raised an eyebrow. "How did you respond?"

Jansky made quote marks with his hands. "'I don't know what you're talking about,'" he said in a mocking voice.

The table laughed.

"You know we used to say the same thing," Maslak said.

We did indeed, Jansky thought. It was an oblique reference to a section he had written in *Prison of the Nation*. Three diarists, all of whom seemed to be non-believers, conceived of their deportation to North Kyiv through the lens of the Babylonian Captivity.

“Why would we?” Tereza asked, confused.

“Don’t you remember your history?” Maslak asked. “The first inhabitants of this ghetto were rounded up and deported here from Siberia.”

Tereza looked taken aback, perhaps embarrassed at his ignorance.

“I suppose it made sense for them to conceive of their situation in terms of their religious myths,” Tereza said.

“It was no myth. The Babylonian captivity really happened,” said Maslak.

“How can we know?”

“We have records from the Babylonian side,” Jansky said.

“Ah,” Tereza said.

“It’s actually an interesting story,” Jansky said. “The Babylonians conquered and exiled the Jews. And the ordinary Jews asked their priests, ‘if we’re God’s chosen people and these rituals you demand from us please God, why did the Babylonians, who did not do the rituals, conquer us?’ And they said, ‘we were punished for not following the rituals *enough*. And when the Persians conquered Babylon and allowed the Jews to rebuild their temple, well, that was God rewarding our religiosity. In any society, there will be some who follow the rules and some who break them, so no matter what happens, the priests can easily explain it. The solution is always the same ‘listen to the priests.’ Quite a good deal for the priests.”

“Not so good a deal for everyone else?” Tereza asked.

“Eh, I don’t know,” Jansky said. “One of the main criticisms of religion, from the Nazis, Commies, and many others, is that it encourages passivity. It tells people there’s some deity up there who is watching and remembering all the injustices and will eventually come and reward the righteous and punish the wicked. But sometimes passivity is the right response. We’re not going to beat the Nazis. If a deity gives people hope and comfort, perhaps it’s not so bad.”

“Might there be some secular, scientific version of eschatology?” Maslak asked.

“Perhaps,” Jansky said. “The sun is brightening. In 500 million years, the sun will brighten, the earth will warm, and carbon dioxide will be leeched from the atmosphere. Plants, and the animals that rely on them, will gradually die out. The age of animal life will be over, but the age of bacteria will continue for another billion years. Eventually, they, too, will be snuffed out by increasing heat.” Jansky paused and contemplated. “So, basically, no.”

The table laughed.

“Well, let’s be more creative in this,” Maslak said. “Suppose a gamma-ray burst hit the planet.”

“Wouldn’t happen for hundreds of millions of years, at least,” Nora said.

“Yes,” Maslak said. “But people have trouble conceiving of truly large numbers. 50 million is placed into the same mental category as 100 million. So the message is that we will win by outlasting them, by waiting patiently here until our ancestors can seize their chance.”

“Hmm,” Jansky said.

“All it needs is a prophet capable of speaking to the masses,” Tereza said.

“Don’t look to me,” Jansky said, smiling.

The table laughed.

“But to be serious, the Russian people abandoned the last religion and will probably abandon the next one.”

The table nodded their head in agreement.

Jansky thought back to a diarist named Maklakov Anatolievich. He was both a Tsarist and an atheist who theorized that the Russians would always be Christian because it allowed them to feel superior to their oppressors. The Nazis would be superior in money, power, and, because of their upbringing, in beauty, physical strength, and knowledge. Christianity would give them a way to feel they had something the Nazis did not, to invert the social pyramid. It may have been true for some Russian Christians. But it was not a strong enough feeling to combat the relentless tide of secularization that has affected the Russians as much as anyone.

“I was a boy,” Maslak said, “when I was young, and Fuhrer Baumann said that ‘there is no heaven, we must build it ourselves,’ I remember sharing the widespread contempt toward the sentiment.”

“Why?” asked Jansky.

Maslak shrugged. “Certainly wasn’t because I believed in any God or afterlife.”

“So, how do you feel about it now,” asked Sveta Sorokin.

“Well,” Maslak said. “The Nazis still cite the quote but rarely include the references to anti-aging treatments. Wasn’t that a flop? But the basic sentiment is correct, I must say. There will never be anything better than what human beings can build.”

Jansky had a theory about why people sneered at Baumann. Beyond the simple hatred of everything Nazi, it reflected the uninformed cynicism that people often adopted to make themselves sound experienced and sophisticated. Most utopian plans fail, but the uninformed cynic who dismisses them all out of habit cannot distinguish the 95% that fail from the 5% that succeed. Jansky didn’t think Maslak would want to hear the theory, so he didn’t share it.

“Do you think?” Jansky asked, “that the habits of mind imbued by Christianity stuck around in us, in the Germans, and in the Americans for the first couple of generations after we abandoned the religion?”

“I do think so,” Maslak said.

“One could test the theory,” Nora said, “by looking to the Asian peoples, particularly the East Asians. Do they respond more favorably to ‘conquest of death’ style rhetoric?”

Maslak shrugged. “I wouldn’t know,” he said.

The conversation continued for about ten more minutes, with Ana Maslak and Sveta Sorokin steering it toward the topic of everyone’s favorite food. At

around 7:30 PM, Leonid Lukyo, Jansky's fellow Eugenics Board member and the Chairman of the Winter Aid, walked up to the podium and stood before the mic. The podium was relatively large, enabled by the high ceilings. As more people noticed his presence, the sound of conversation from the various tables died down. Finally, when only a few people were still conversing, he spoke into the microphone.

"My friends," Lukyo said, in a pose of confidence and celebration, "I am proud to open 2096's Winter Aid drive and give my personal thanks to our ten most generous donors. Their donations will help countless Russians affected by poverty and need in this ghetto and beyond. I will invite these top donors to come up to the podium and receive the gratitude of everyone in this room."

Name by name, the donors were called up. Usually, they were called up as couples, sometimes as individuals. They ranged from middle-aged to elderly. Yuri and Ana Maslak were the eighth to be called up. The final couple and the most generous donors were Joseph and Mara Benov. Joseph Benov's company had revamped Cagosoft's operating system and his personal reputation for generosity was equaled by his company's reputation for a harsh and demanding work environment.

After the Benovs shook hands with Lukyo, Anton Linov walked up to the podium. He was the "honorary President" of the PA and many other charities. With Lukyo standing next to him, Linov walked up to the mic and began to speak. "Hello," he said, looking happy but a bit nervous. "I am pleased to introduce our speakers, four men who will speak to you tonight. I must remind our speakers to limit themselves to no more than twenty minutes, as we all have families and businesses we must attend to. Without further ado, I will introduce our first speaker, the brilliant Dr. Dmitry Lakov."

Lakov got up from one of the tables, walked to the podium, and shook hands with Linov and Lukyo. Linov turned back to the crowd and began speaking.

"Dr. Lakov is among the most brilliant medical men of his generation. He will speak about new frontiers in medicine."

The audience clapped, and Linov and Lukyo returned to their tables. After the clapping finished, Lakov began his speech. As Maslak predicted, it had nothing to do with the Winter Aid, being about medical advances in stem cell technology. Jansky could swear he had heard the same imminent predictions a decade ago, quite possibly by the same man. After Lakov finished speaking, the audience clapped and Linov introduced the next speaker. Garry Gagarin was another of Jansky's fellow Eugenics Board members and the Principal of Bendzary Public High School. His speech was more interesting, about the process of identifying the smartest kids in the ghetto and admitting them to the school. This was a form of "poverty alleviation," so it had some relationship to the Winter Aid drive, which Gagarin never mentioned. The third speaker was Nikolai Zenov, the scion of a prominent old-money banking family. He spoke about the process of semi-charitable loans to the ghetto's

poor in a way that implied there was great promise in the idea without making any concrete, falsifiable predictions or telling the audience how much his firm was “investing” in the concept. Like the two previous speakers, he did not mention the Winter Aid.

All told, Jansky was impressed by the vocabulary level, if not necessarily the content, of the three speeches. He looked around the room to see if anyone seemed obviously bored. Nobody did. They all had their eyes on the podium, though some were still chewing or drinking wine. It was clear why Linov didn’t bring his children. They’d be playing on their phones.

After Zenov finished his speech, Linov walked up to the podium and Jansky soon followed him, standing beside and underneath him.

“Now,” Linov said, looking toward the audience, “I will introduce our final speaker, a bright young man who works as a financial analyst and who I have appointed to the Popular Commission for Oversight of the Enforcement of the Productivization Mandate.” He looked almost pained when pronouncing the long-form name. “His speech will concern the historical context of the mandate’s creation.” He turned to Jansky, then back to the audience. He began to clap, as did the audience. Linov then walked off the podium and Jansky walked up. Once the audience finished clapping, Jansky began his speech.

“Hello,” Jansky said. “I want to start by thanking two men who have been a great deal of help to me, President Anton Linov and Councilman Yuri Maslak. There are, of course, many others I would like to thank, but I only have twenty minutes,” he said, smiling. He then formed his face into a serious look and spoke in a serious tone. “Now,” he said, “I have a vitally important question for you. What is the difference between the financial analyst and the disheveled man ranting in the street that he has seen the future? The financial analyst has a calculator.”

There were chuckles and laughs from the audience. Most seemed to expect it, but a few looked genuinely shocked at the self-deprecating joke. Perhaps they thought the “boy genius” would not be so self-aware.

“I will talk today about why the Nazis made the decision they made this spring. To see it from their perspective is not easy. First, I’ll start with some counterfactual history. Suppose that Christopher Columbus had sailed West to find India and, rather than hitting America by mistake, had died of starvation in the world ocean. Because there was no America to find. It is easy to look at events of the 19th century and file them under the grand Rubicon of ‘effects of the industrial revolution.’ Yet, when you think about counterfactuals, you realize that the industrial revolution did not need to happen the way it did in the 19th century. It could have been very different.”

“There were fundamentally two things happening in the 19th century, two kinds of investment opportunity. One could build new machines and new factories to house those machines. Or, one could invest in ships, railways, and start-up provisions for new colonies in the Americas, Australasia, and to a

lesser extent in Siberia. The second opportunity was not cutting-edge technological advancement but was North Dakota and Primorye “catching up” to the agrarian world of Europe. Throughout history, our ancestors have mostly lacked either investment opportunity. Technological development was slow, and while one could invest in soldiers to conquer a neighboring land, that neighboring land would be of a similar technological level, so it was a zero-sum game. Whereas the Europeans who came to America could take what the natives had, transplant their technology to the New World, and make it far more productive than it had ever been. Even if there was *no* technological advancement after 1800, the population would have continued to expand because the carrying capacity of the world at 1800’s level of technology was greater than its population.”

“Our world is, at first glance, quite like the world of 1800. Estimates of our current carrying capacity vary, but no respectable estimate is less than 50 billion. The question then and now was to balance investment in “catch-up-growth” of the underpopulated periphery with “cutting edge growth” in the core. But there are two major differences between that world and our world today. First, there is the amount of our income available for investment. 1800 was still a very hand-to-mouth kind of world. When you must spend 95% of your income on food and shelter, you can’t invest more than 5%, no matter how frugal you are. The two investment opportunities had to compete for a small pool of capital, which resulted in high interest rates. As the bounty of technology increased and people could devote more of their incomes to investment, interest rates started to fall. This phenomenon is traceable to before January 30, 1933, and is not the result of Nazi manipulation. Contrary to what you may have been told, low-interest rates have never been a Nazi ideological goal. They spoke a great deal about unemployment, Bolshevism, Jews, and lebensraum. ‘We need low interest rates’ was never an NSDAP slogan. But I’m getting sidetracked.”

“The second difference between our world and the world of 1800 concerns the limiting factor on the ‘catch-up growth.’ In 1800 it was the expense of colonization itself, the ships and rifles and horses and wagons. There were always many second-sons who could be found in Europe who were willing to populate and farm the ‘empty’ land. In our world today, this is not the case. What prevents the conversion of some tract of Sumatran rainforest into farmland that would produce corn, rice, potatoes, and palm oil? The limiting factor is the market for those products. The population does not ‘want’ to expand.”

“Thus, you have the conditions for the imposition of the productivization mandate. Litzer cannot just ‘force’ technological advancement to accelerate, it is *hard* and the fact that interest rates are so low implies the problem is not insufficient capital investment but insufficient brainpower. But he can force the population to expand and, given the low interest rate environment, this will not take much capital away from technological advances.”

“Why us? Since the beginning of the Reich, the Nazis have had some natalist incentives, however minor. As the Reich got richer, they could devote more and more resources to it so that by the 2030s, the Germans enjoyed undoubtedly eugenic fertility. But it is a eugenics policy more than a natalist policy. NSDAP members are encouraged to marry and have children. The eugenics program that applies to the Germans is a long-term ideological goal expected to bear significant fruit in the distant future. From the perspective of the Reich’s tax coffers, nearly all Germans are net liabilities. For the Reich subjects, the effect on the Reich’s tax coffers is much more difficult to estimate,” Jansky said. He didn’t say aloud that the Nazis do “estimate” this, but nobody should trust it. “While for us, the impact is very clear and very positive.”

“One question I am often asked is why there isn’t more ‘eugenics.’ The Nazis sterilize Germans who are alcoholics, have very low IQs, and who are ‘sexually immoral.’ Yet they do not try to discourage reproduction among the merely below-average. Nor do the subject pillars. Why is this? The man who hauls concrete across a construction site and goes home to drown his sorrows with alcohol, to cheat on and fight with his wife, who regards reading as a chore, he is still economically useful. So as long as he can keep it under the table, the Germans do not seek his sterilization.”

“Think about the descendants of humanity in the year 4,000 C.E,” Jansky said with intentional vagueness as to who they were. “How will look back on us? We will be primitive, obviously. Some of this primitivism will be biological. They will see us as maladapted to the environment we only recently entered, unintelligent, highly emotional, with tendencies toward addiction and short-term thinking. But they will also see us as technologically primitive. And, if they are smart, they will recognize that the brute they look down on played a role in building their world. There is an unfortunate tendency of many smart people to think of economic growth as solely the product of some nerds in white lab coats conducting experiments. It also requires grunts to turn the nerd’s design into a working factory. In the distant future, machines may completely replace human muscle power, but that day is very far off. In the meantime, it can be beneficial for the grunt to have more than two children. The world is sufficiently underpopulated that there is no reason to discourage his reproduction to ‘make room’ for anyone else.”

“In the distant future, this will no longer be true. One can spend many an hour imagining what that time will be like, but I will not do so here. For that time will be very far off,” Jansky said. It was a clear invitation to speculate about that dark time, though only a minority would have the intelligence to do so. Would there be sterilization? Extermination? Would there be an “intelligence explosion” that might make the grunt, and indeed the computer programmer, obsolete overnight?

“Now,” Jansky said, “I will address one annoying and possibly dangerous misconception about the productivization mandate. People have told me the

Nazis will walk it back. Because they'll have to, due to widespread refusal to cooperate. They have yet to walk back the giant wall they put around the ghetto, nor their tax policy. Where do beliefs like this come from? Perhaps the belief in a decrepit class that lacks the guts to enforce its own laws may not come from observation of the distant machinery of the Nazi state but from factors closer to home.” He paused for about three seconds, then smiled. “Nevertheless, I am optimistic. There are many reasons to be so. If you look at the statistics, we are getting richer, slowly but steadily. This is the case if you look at the flow of Weltmarks; it is also the case if you look at the ‘physical facts,’ how many tonnes of goods are imported to the ghetto per capita. We will maintain this wealth so long as we remember our values, hard work, frugality, and most importantly, individual responsibility.” He paused and smiled again. “Thank you,” he said.

There was steady applause, coming especially from Maslak’s table. There was no applause coming from Linov’s table, but Jansky thought that many other ‘Linov loyalists’ were clapping because they were unsure of what else to do. Jansky, after all, had been introduced by Linov, and not everyone would interpret his speech as an attack on Linov’s leadership. Jansky smiled and stood on the podium for a few seconds before he walked down and returned to his seat.

For about thirty seconds, nobody was at the podium. Probably Linov was expected to walk up there, but he did not do so. Linov looked plain, not angry and was sipping a glass of wine. But Lukyo, who was at the table with him, looked concerned. Lukyo stood up, walked over to Linov, and whispered something in his ear. Linov just looked annoyed and Lukyo then walked up to the podium. This was it, Jansky thought. He had decidedly “broken with Linov.” Nevertheless, he did not intend to cease giving reports to Pavlov, as he wanted to maintain that line of communication.

Lukyo smiled and stood at the podium. “Brilliant speeches,” he said. The audience began to clap. After the clapping died down, Lukyo resumed. “I know you are all busy people, and I understand if you want to leave immediately. If you want to stay and socialize, the waitstaff will be here until 10:30 PM. As always, I thank you for your extraordinary generosity and wish you all best wishes for the year to come. Thank you.”

Chapter 14

Toma Jansky, Boris Matei, and Afan Godunov were best friends in high school. Godunov was an only child and had his own room, which became the usual hangout. The 2097 Toma Jansky would think the room was oppressively small, he was sure. But to him at the time, it was normal, comfortable. Two would sit on the bed, one on the office chair. There was no room for a fourth. They would speak about nerdy subjects that adults, smaller children, and most other teenagers found uninteresting, if not cringe-inducing.

Jansky was reminded of the conversation as he sat in the private office of Yuri Maslak and conversed with him and Ivan Vinov. Maslak sat at his desk, Vinov and Jansky on the red couch. The three were dressed like teenagers, shorts and a t-shirt for Maslak, jeans, and t-shirts for Jansky and Vinov. They were speaking about a subject uninteresting to most, science fiction. Jansky, Matei, and Godunov were all middle-class boys. There was no “hierarchy” among them. The situation with Maslak, Vinov, and Jansky was different. Yuri Maslak, the hereditary aristocrat, was the man who paid the bills. Ivan Vinov had some status among those who went to Bendzary Public in the early 2060s. Among everyone else, he was unknown. Jansky had been unknown to most everyone until that year. Glanzia membership was a badge of intelligence, sure, but not enough to remember someone’s name. The productivization mandate changed that. After Jansky’s speech to the PA, he became recognized as some kind of political player.

Most memorable for Jansky was an incident at the supermarket. The woman who approached him was stunningly beautiful and appeared to be about twenty-five years old. “I hope you do it,” she had said. He asked her what she meant and expected a wink-wink. Instead, she responded, “I hope you throw that dog Linov out.” He uneasily said he had no plans to do so and scurried away. There were several more incidents like this, and he had been surprised by them, though in hindsight, he shouldn’t have been. In prior eras, people knew only the image of the President and Chief of Police, whose photographs appeared in pillar offices. A challenger they would know only from word of mouth. It’s not like he could set up a printing press and hand out pamphlets with his image. But anyone could plug “Toma Jansky” into Koppeln and see his resume, his smiling face at the top. After his speech to the PA, his name and his image spread.

Jansky’s previously foggy image of the council had grown much sharper as he had met with all but three council members. They could be grouped into three categories, pro-Maslak, pro-Linov, and “swing voters.” The pro-Maslak side had only Maslak himself. If one classed Artur Savel and the three who refused to meet Jansky as Linov loyalists, that left seven “swing voters.”

Councilman Konstantin Protsenko was fat, with oily blond hair and grey eyes. He had inherited half of a hoteling empire, a business that could be crippled if the Kripo gets angry and restricts “family visitation” across ghettos. He didn’t want to talk about Taras Linov and firmly believed that the Bogeyman was not real. He could not justify this with any sociological or economic reasoning when Jansky pressed him. Regardless, he strongly concurred with Jansky when he expressed a desire to see “stronger leadership” than the Linov dynasty was providing. “Does this mean you?” Jansky had asked. Protsenko responded that it doesn’t matter who it is so long as he is strong. He reminded Jansky somewhat of Yuri Maslak, except dumber and without Maslak’s “worn uncle” personality. Jansky got the vague feeling that he was only polite to Jansky because it was to his advantage to do so and

would be a harsh and unpleasant boss.

Shislov Yakovich seemed to have a warmer personality. He was the youngest council member at thirty-six and resembled the Nazi posters of the ideal Nordic man, fit, handsome, blond-haired, and blue-eyed. He refused to discuss the productivization mandate, but Jansky sensed he was worried about it. On Taras Linov, he was less equivocal. Yes, Yakovich said, the rumors about Taras Linov were true, and yes, he would not vote for him. But he refused to say who he would vote for. He told Jansky “not to worry too much” because “the council never makes decisions lightly.” Jansky had a hard time believing this but sensed that Yakovich did. He had been raised in that world and could not help but look at it through rose-colored glasses.

Protsenko and Yakovich would vote against Taras Linov, if not for Yuri Maslak. The other four were less predictable. Vladimir Averin was probably the dumbest of the nine council members Jansky had met. He had light brown hair that was very long, of a length that would raise eyebrows even in the relatively casual world of computer programming. He told Jansky he was “retired” and refused point-blank to discuss Taras Linov or the productivization mandate. Instead, he went on an hour-long monologue about music. He was in some sort of guitar-playing society and counted himself an expert on the subject. Jansky had tried hard to feign interest. When Jansky asked if he was a member of or had ever toured A.F. Club, Averin looked honestly confused at the question. “Why would I?” Averin asked. He didn’t say anything against the “new money,” didn’t condemn them for their gauche or nerdy ways. To Averin, people like him were members of A.G. Club, not A.F. Club, simple as that. This would naturally align him with Linov. Yet he was clearly not the model old-money aristocrat who cuts his hair and has an official-sounding job title. Yet perhaps Averin would find the underachiever Taras Linov as a kindred soul. Jansky hoped not. Averin seemed to have a kindness and decency that Jansky imagined Taras lacking.

Yana Kobzar was the only woman on the pillar council. She was a councilman’s daughter and was sixty years old. Like Averin, she refused to speak about Taras Linov or the productivization mandate. Unlike him, she had many sociological observations about her class of old money elites. And she was interested in Jansky’s sociological observations about his own class. Jansky understated his class’s hostility to her class and thought she did the same, whether deliberately or not. Jansky left the meeting feeling like the two connected well, despite her refusal to discuss the “issue of succession.” “You’re like the son-in-law I never had,” she had told him. At the time, he wasn’t sure if the issue was that she didn’t have any sons-in-law or that she wished her daughters had chosen differently. A check on *Koppeln* confirmed it was later.

Roman Shvets was a handsome forty-two-year-old man who seemed, apart from Maslak, to be the smartest on the council. Apart from Artur Savel, who occupied the non-hereditary council seat reserved for the chief of the

ghetto police, Shvets was the only council member not related by blood or marriage to a prior councilman or President. He got his seat gifted to him by being the most talented subordinate of a childless councilman. While Shvets was not “royalty,” he was “nobility,” being from a prominent old-money family. He was surprisingly frank with Jansky, admitting that it would be better if council members could pick “whoever they wanted” to elect as President. But he would not “say this on the record” or “cause any controversy.” What if six council members are voting one way, five are voting the other way, and you’re the swing vote? Shvets shrugged and dismissed the question as a “hypothetical,” as if they were speaking about utility monsters or p-zombies.

Egor Belsky was the son-in-law of one council member and the cousin of another. He agreed with Jansky that the Bogeyman was a problem. But he disagreed about the source of the problem. Jansky said it would be in the courts where false exemptions would be given. Belsky agreed but said this would be due to pressure from the ghetto police, insisting there was “little difference” between the police and the legal system. This was true in some regimes in some areas but was certainly not the case in the North Kyiv Ghetto. The career tracks of lawyers and policemen are wholly different. In any case, Jansky asked, what did it matter? Either way, we want a man who realizes it’s a problem, right? But Belsky replied that it would be better to keep the Linov family in power to better oppose “the aristocracy within the police.” Jansky suspected this was a trick to get Maslak to focus his fire on Savel rather than Linov. He couldn’t be sure, though. Many ignorant people thought the police, prosecutors, and judges were one and the same. Perhaps Belsky, who didn’t seem very bright, was one of them. When Jansky asked about Taras Linov, Belsky shut him up before he finished his sentence. “I will not discuss that!”

All in all, the council members were a bunch of ordinary people. Averin was the underachiever, Maslak the nerd who was smart but not as smart as he thought he was, Protsenko the jerk, and Kobzar the aunt who complains about her sons-in-law. These were the people who ran the North Kyiv Ghetto. That was exactly what one should expect given the aristocratic structure. Sure, their grandfathers and great grandfathers had “earned” their positions. But they shared only 1/4th or 1/8th of that forefather’s genes. It wasn’t like the top people selected their wives for talent in politics. And even if they did, their children would regression toward the mean.

“What did you think of *The Dynasty of Tomorrow?*” Maslak asked, looking toward Jansky.

Tomorrow’s setting was a common one, the alien asteroid belt. Its hero was a mid-level manager in a slave-trading firm. The firm was abusive, and not just to the slaves. “I liked it,” Jansky said. “Well-written, engaging. Went into more detail about the company than is typical, though it still left the nature of the corporation vague. There were clearly some people at the top

who were getting all the money, but whether it was publicly traded, private, owned by a single family, wasn't said."

"I'd bet the author never thought about it," Vinov said. "To the German novelist, corporations are all abstraction."

"Indeed," Maslak said. He turned to Jansky. "What about your own ideas for science fiction novels?"

Jansky smiled. He had toyed with the idea, after finishing *Prison of the Nation*, of writing a science fiction novel. Sharing the idea with Maslak signaled loyalty by emphasizing his long-term orientation toward the time-capsule project

"Suppose in two hundred years," Jansky said, "the Reich is overthrown. Out of the capsule comes the first acknowledged Russian-authored novel in three hundred years. It will be notable for that reason, but it shouldn't just be notable for that reason. It should differ from the many novels ghostwritten by Russians and published under German names. So here's my idea. Suppose nothing really changes in the structure of society. In three hundred years, there are still Germans, Reich subjects, and subhumans. The Nazis are working on the generation ship, and while they test the thrusters and relay guns and photon torpedos, they'll also worry about the psychological and sociological effects on the passengers. Who are the natural guinea pigs?"

"Us," Maslak said.

Jansky nodded.

"So, what does the experiment look like?"

"The experiment will want to mimic the actual environment of the generation ship as much as possible. What will the generation ship itself look like? I don't think it will match the depiction you see where it's full of green spaces and contains thousands of people. I think it will have a few hundred and will be cramped. Remember: the ship doesn't just need to make the journey but also carry the tools necessary to start up in the new solar system."

"So what does the mock-up on earth look like? It will contain three hundred Russians, sealed off from the rest of the world in a cramped space. The Russians might need to do tasks, farming and repairing broken down tools, to mimic the tasks onboard the ship. Since the German volunteers will need to be smart, so will the Russians. There will be doctors, mechanics, physicists, and so on. There will also be a captain and a hierarchy. The Russians who volunteer for the experiment will be the same kind of people as the Germans who volunteer for the actual ship. They are the type of people who will say, 'give me some screens, all the books and tv shows in the world, a sexual partner, maybe some vodka and gin, and I need nothing more. Fresh air and greenery and tourism and fancy food, that's all overrated. Just as the Germans will be motivated by the belief that their descendants will multiply and found a new arm of German civilization, the Russians will be given the hope that their descendants will complete the experiment and be freed from the ships to return to the ghettos as millionaires.'

“The Russians will,” Jansky said, “in a way be similar to the Russians taken on the actual generation ships. Going from ghetto to ship to ghetto. But the trip will differ dramatically. The Russians in the experiment will be the overlords over the ship, LARPing as if they were Germans.”

“It will be,” Vinov said, “similar in many ways to the world of our ancestors. The *small world* we are adapted to, where we lived in bands of a few hundred people, where our rulers were people we knew, not some distant insular caste.”

“Yes,” Jansky said. “It’s why you see the pattern so often in science fiction. An asteroid mining station of a few hundred people, etc. You have modern medicine, climate control, literacy, but very few people. There’s something very attractive about that.”

“But is it attractive to the reader, or merely the censor?” asked Maslak.

“There is a sense in which the censors want us to only imagine worlds *worse* than our own. But the attraction of the small world goes deeper. In both our world and the small world, your social circle contains a few hundred people. But my three hundred people are different from your three hundred people, and so on. In the small world, everyone’s social horizon is the same. In our world, you can have one persona at work, another with your wife, another with friends, and yet another with your parents. Since this is not possible in the small world, you are freed from the mental burden of doing so. In our world, large institutions impose rules one cannot hope to change, things like hiring policies. In the small world, the guy named Vlad sets the hiring policy, and your father and uncle know him well. Maybe they can change his mind.”

“Oh, I see it now,” Maslak said. “This will be an allegory for our current situation with a man named Linov.”

Jansky smiled. “Yes,” he said. “There will be a captain of the ship and a council of twelve men with the ability to throw him out or choose his successor.”

“Why not just have the story take place in a ghetto?” Vinov asked. “That would be just as unique. No novel has ever taken place in a ghetto.”

“I thought about it,” Jansky said. “But my fear is that even if I put in capital letters ‘THIS IS A WORK OF FICTION,’ it will be taken to be a historical document. And I like the generation ship idea. I want to explore the tension that will arise when the second generation grows up. They will be told that there is this big world out there that they cannot experience because of a decision their parents made.”

Vinov smiled. “An intriguing idea,” he said.

They continued to discuss it for the next hour, with Vinov having suggestions that Jansky thought were very good and wrote down in case he actually did write the novel. When the clock struck two, he left as he was to meet his parents.

On exiting the building, Jansky’s skin was pierced with the frigid cold and

the wet, heavy snow of January 2097. Visibility was poor; one couldn't see a block down, let alone the sun. But Jansky wouldn't head home. The snowstorm was the whole reason he was seeing his parents, for his father had been given the day off. He made it to the bus stop and waited five minutes before a bus, complete with a snow plow in front, arrived. There were a fair number of people on the bus. Perhaps they, too, were taking advantage of the no-working day. He took a window seat on one of the few open aisles and took out a book, careful not to get it wet. He read for a few minutes before he was interrupted by a young girl.

"Hi," she said, staring at him with delighted curiosity. "You're Toma Jansky, right?" She looked around ten years old and was quite cute, with blond hair and hazel eyes. She wore a light blue sweater that had some holes, indicating she was of working or middle-class origin.

Jansky stared at her for a moment, then looked around the bus. There was nobody who seemed to be accompanying the girl. Still, he thought it unlikely that someone that young would recognize him on her own. He thought about denying it but almost instantly dismissed the idea. A "politician" should not be afraid of the people. "Yes, I am," he said.

The girl smiled. "Are crypto-Jews real?" she asked.

He shivered. It wasn't necessarily *verboten* to discuss the subject on the bus. He had heard people do it before, but they were nobodies, working Joes who told stories they probably didn't believe, deep down. He was different, a man who could be arrested for saying the wrong thing about it. But what if he gave the opinion that was both factually and politically correct? He smiled as he thought about replying, "sorry, I can't talk to random little girls since I don't want to be accused of being a pedophile." But he realized that the person who put her up to it might be someone Jansky would want to win over. Perhaps the girl was the daughter of a "nobleman" who dressed her in slightly tattered clothes to disguise this. Jansky had perpetrated a similar trick when he went to the dentist.

He turned toward the girl and smiled. "Crypto-Jews are not real. After World War Three, there were Jews who pretended they were not Jewish. But they did so as individuals. They told nobody who they were, including their children, who grew up believing they were pure Russians. Today there are people who have a bit of Jewish blood in them, but there are no secret societies of Jews."

"Why do people say it if it's not true?" she asked. She looked and sounded perfectly sincere.

"Same reason people tell stories about monsters. People like telling stories, even adults." He stopped himself before adding, "often they do so because their lives are boring and they don't have anything better to do." If some powerful noble put her up to it and said powerful noble believed in the myth, Jansky should not needlessly alienate them.

The girl had a look of contemplation on her face, as if she wanted to say

something but didn't know what to say. After a few seconds, her facial expression changed to frustration, as if she was upset she could not cut it in the adult conversation she had foolishly joined. After a few more seconds, Jansky saw a man about five aisles back stand up and walk over to them.

"You seem very confident of that," the man said. He appeared around thirty-five and had brown eyes, a slight beard, and short, light brown hair. He vaguely looked like he could be related to the girl. Like her, his black coat had a few holes.

"You put her up to this?" Jansky asked in a neutral voice.

"Yeah," the man said.

"Do you think crypto-Jews exist?"

"I don't know why you're so confident in dismissing the possibility," the man snorted.

Jansky turned to the girl. "You've been to the Sugenlar, right?"

She nodded, confirming to Jansky that she was at least nine years old.

"They took a swab from the inside of your mouth, right?" he asked, pointing to her cheek.

After a second of thinking, she nodded.

"You see, after they did that, the Kripo policemen took the spit and they put it in a machine. The machine told them your ethnic mix. If you have one eighth-Jewish blood, they know. If you were a crypto-Jew, they would have been able to find out. If secret societies of crypto-Jews existed, they would have found them years ago."

The girl looked confused. To a child, the idea that one can take a person's saliva and figure out their ethnic origins seems like magic. But the man with her didn't seem confused at all, looking at Jansky with a stare of contempt. Jansky stared back at him with a neutral look. For about twenty seconds, they both stared at each other, neither wanting to initiate what Jansky thought would be an argument about something other than the crypto-Jew theory.

"They say you're trying to convince the pillar council to overthrow Linov," the man said.

Jansky felt his stomach turn, but he tried to force his facial expression to remain neutral. He then rolled his eyes. "They say a lot of things."

"It's not true?"

"It's not true," Jansky said in a friendly but forceful tone.

"I think it is. I think you're doing the whole populist act. I also think you're no different from the rest of them. You're gonna tell us to submit, pay our taxes, don't think anything but happy thoughts."

While Jansky thought the girl could be from any class origin, he got a strongly working-class vibe from the man. Perhaps he was nonetheless a noble, or more realistically, there was a third person who put *him* up to it. Most likely, though, was that the man was exactly what he looked like. A construction worker or such who was on the lookout for drama. Should Jansky turn his head and refuse to engage? Part of him wanted to, but he was

also concerned about how it would look. And he was curious to know what the peanut gallery thought of him. “Do I have any co-conspirators in this plot?” Jansky asked. He spoke in a plain voice to give the impression he didn’t take the accusation seriously.

The man looked taken aback by the question. “Not that I know of,” he said in a sinister voice.

Jansky was disappointed but forced himself to smirk. The Linov-Maslak feud was common knowledge among the people who swim with pillar councilmen. This was a good thing, as it would force them to make a decision. That this knowledge would spread to the masses was probably inevitable. But Jansky did not want it to look like *he* was the head of the conspiracy. That was Maslak’s job.

At this point, two men in the row in front of Jansky turned around and looked at the three. They were dressed in heavy black coats typical of working-class men. A boy two rows ahead who looked about thirteen was also facing them, as was an elderly man from the isle across. They now had an audience.

“Look, I’m not plotting to overthrow the President. And you don’t have to worry about them barging in here looking for crypto-Jews because crypto-Jews do not exist. That’s the truth.” Jansky hoped he sounded polite but firm.

“The truth? That the Kripo can tell your ethnicity from saliva?”

“Yes,” Jansky said.

“Do the Nazis say they have this capability?”

“Not directly, but it’s there. Read between the lines.”

“So, in other words, you’re just making crap up. Just like the rest of them. You would say anything possible to get us to obey the Nazis. You’d send your own daughter to the brothel if meant you could keep your coffee and tea.”

Jansky thought about telling the man that, in fact, he drank imitation coffee but decided against it. A man who implies that one or two working-class habits make him working class looks like an out-of-touch elitist. “As I said, you have to read between the lines. I get that it’s hard to do when you have a f***ing 70 IQ, but please try.”

“You don’t got crap.”

The man’s skepticism was reasonable, Jansky thought. Much of what people read into Nazi propaganda wasn’t actually there. Still, one had to be a moron to believe in crypto-Jews. “You could also ask someone who works professionally on DNA scanning. *Jaman* and *Gallwitz Corp*, here in Kyiv, did the majority of the grunt work on the human genome project. Most of their employees are Russians based here or in the Main Ghetto.”

“I’ll do that,” the man said derisively. He turned toward the two men in front of Jansky and glanced toward the boy and the elderly man. “Can you believe this guy,” he said.

One of the two men sitting in front of Jansky remained silent. The other quietly said, “I don’t want any trouble.” He didn’t sound afraid but didn’t

sound brave either. The pre-teen boy turned away. The elderly man pointed to Jansky. "I say he's winning the argument."

Jansky smiled. At that moment, the bus decelerated and began to pull over. Jansky habitually looked ahead to see if there was a traffic obstruction. After a split second, he realized what was happening. The driver got out of his seat and walked toward them. The boy looked around fifteen and was, for lack of a better word, cute. And he seemed ticked off. He pointed to the man, then the girl, and then Jansky. "All three of you will get off my bus. I don't care who started the argument. You can continue it in the street. Move." He spoke rapidly and firmly.

Jansky considered remaining in place, but only for a second. He understood the boy's perspective and could catch the next bus. The boy, elderly man, and two men in front all looked away from the scene. Jansky put his book away and stood up, clutching his book and backpack. He then walked toward the front, quickly followed by the man and the girl. They got off and stood on the sidewalk, watching the bus drive away. After a few seconds, they looked to one another.

"So what's your name, mystery man?" Jansky asked.

"Ivan Pucek," said the man.

The three began walking south, to the bus stop Jansky knew was three blocks away.

"You said I will tell you to pay your taxes and submit," Jansky said, looking ahead and not at his companion. "That's true. But what do you propose, Mr. Pucek? Do you propose we take that bus and convert it to fight their tanks? Make our own homemade guns? They could crush us without even breaking a sweat."

Jansky turned to Pucek, who looked silently ahead.

"There it is," Jansky said. "The silence that always follows that question. You rage and rage about how you don't like the current system's outcomes without any ideas of what you'd do differently."

"Oh, sure," Pucek snorted. "Act like you guys got the power because you beat us in some kind of free and open debate. We had an election, and you won it!"

"The Nazis won't let us have an election," Jansky said. "But we can have a debate. Tell me when and where."

"How about tomorrow? Noon, Petersberg mall, food court, second floor, corner by the vending machines?"

Jansky got out his phone and removed his gloves, exposing his hands to the frigid cold. He then wrote down the details and repeated them back to Pucek, who confirmed they were correct.

"I'll see you there," Pucek said.

He, Pucek, and the girl walked the three blocks in silence, then sat on the benches and waited for the next bus. Jansky texted his father, warning that he would be late. When he arrived at the complex, he did not go up to their

eighteenth-floor apartment. Instead, he wiped the melted snow from his face, sat on the uncomfortable steel chairs in the lobby, and dialed for Yuri Maslak. Did he just act rashly, stupidly? He honestly wanted to know Maslak's opinion. No, Maslak told him, it was brilliant. Some will think you're erratic, but more will think you're brave. Jansky will be known as a man who is afraid of neither the people nor the ghetto police.

Chapter 15

Hans Litzer once quipped that religion started as a comforting lie parents told their children. The children had always been told the truth once they reached maturity. But in one generation, a prankster convinced everyone that it would be funny to see how long it took the kids to figure it out for themselves. Jansky thought something similar had occurred in the diarists' time. Children asked their parents what happened to their Jewish friends. "They're in Central Asia," they were told. Indeed, a few did flee there, but there was no systematic reason to go there rather than somewhere else in Russia. But adults said it, children believed it, and some adults believed it too. One of the diarists believed it enough to speculate in 1990 about whether "the Jews in Central Asia" were having an easier or a harder time than the Russians in North Kyiv.

What actually happened to the Jews? The "unassimilated," the older, the circumcised, those who spoke Yiddish or Yiddish-accented Russian, were arrested and killed. But for the young and assimilated, who spoke perfect Russian, Jansky thought about half survived. Local Russian officials and churchmen eagerly gave them phony birth certificates and they left for other towns, joining the masses of refugees from the bombings. Identification in the era was crude; many ethnic Russians had little of it themselves. "Jew-hunts" relied heavily on informers, who often provided false information to get rewards or settle personal scores. Whether through frustration with false accusations or secret opposition to the genocide, it soon became clear that many German officials were less than fully interested in hearing denunciations. But people did not want to tell their children the Jews had been murdered, nor did they want to tell them the neighbors could be secret Jews in danger of being pulled out of their homes and murdered tomorrow. So they said they "fled to Central Asia." Many children, and adults, believed it.

Eventually, the deportees' children and grandchildren wised up to what had happened. To say that a person, place, or thing was "in Central Asia" was to imply that it is gone and never coming back. If the story of Central Asia was the deportee generation's fable, their sons and grandsons would invent an even stupider one. Supposedly those hidden Jews continued practicing their religion, married among themselves, and still exist a hundred years later.

According to the Nazis, half of the Russian Jews were married to gentiles *in 1970*. Among the historically Christian Russians, it was commonly stated

that 4% still believed in the Christian religion. Jansky thought the actual percentage was even lower. This was so even though it wasn't illegal to be Christian. Believers could read their bible, pray, and even have crucifixes in their homes, though not on their bodies. Why would the Jews, facing literal murder, maintain their religion when the Christians did not? Were they continuing to maintain their community because of "an ideology of race?" What idiocy.

Why did people believe in the myth of crypto-Jews? It fed into their desire to tell stories about how the world is more interesting than meets the eye. That tiny point in the sky isn't an airplane or weather balloon. It's an alien craft! And Andrei downstairs? He seems like a completely average man, nothing unusual about him. But behind closed doors, he's a member of this secret society! He has a menorah and a Kiddush cup and a Hebrew prayer book. In truth, people "behind closed doors" are usually *less* interesting than they seem. They watch TV and eat microwaved food in their underwear, occasionally scratching their butt. Yuri Maslak was probably the closest thing to a cartoon character in Jansky's life, and even for him, the "true character" does not differ much from the public persona. He's a Machiavellian politician and wants you to know it. It's not like the conspiracy is being led by the janitor.

Vinov always said that one should be suspicious of stories. One reason was that characters in a story could exhibit intelligence, loyalty, and dedication to an unrealistic degree. Because people are primed to admire these traits, their response is not "this is unrealistic" but "this resonates with me." For Ivan Pucek, there was perhaps another reason to believe the story. It was a stick he could use to beat the pillar with, say they'd collaborate in rounding up the crypto-Jews. This wasn't usually a factor in the story. It seemed like those who told it didn't think about what one should *do* if it turned out to be true. If they did, they'd realize that the crypto-Jews would want them to *shut up*.

There had been a break in the weather, and it was sunny and about fifty degrees Fahrenheit. Many were out and about on the sidewalks, enjoying the Sunday break. Toma Jansky, Nora Jansky, and Ivan Vinov were standing in an alleyway about five feet from the sidewalk, waiting for noon and the "debate." Toma Jansky wore his trademark business suit and red tie. Nora wore makeup and a blue-and-white dress. He lacked the fashion vocabulary to characterize the dress but knew it connotated the relative conservatism of the young, married mother. Ivan Vinov was dressed slightly more casually, with a tan suit and no tie. It was not how one dressed in the world of finance but was normal in the world of tech.

In another universe, he might be a democratic politician, running for a seat in a provincial legislature but with long-term ambitions for a much higher office. Maslak, his patron, had endorsed his campaign while Anton Linov endorsed his opponent. Nora was his devoted wife, while Ivan Vinov was a

political consultant, talented at coming up with slogans but without the *suave* to be a politico himself.

Jansky did not have unanimous support in Glanzia for his decision to debate Paucek. Koloda Sorokin had called him that morning and urged him not to do it. He wasn't angry or anything; he just said it risked making Jansky look like a "loose cannon." Jansky thanked Sorokin for the advice and said he'd consider it. He and Sorokin were not particularly close, and Jansky couldn't see a cynical reason for the warning. But ultimately, Jansky decided to listen to Maslak and Vinov, who urged him to do it. The main thing was for Jansky to signal bravery. The men of the pillar council did not want a true "man of the masses." But they looked more positively on a man who was at heart a "nerd" but was not afraid to mingle with the masses, who understood them better than the cloistered elites. If it risked Jansky looking reckless, that was no matter. It was Maslak, a known quantity, who they were being asked to elect. Jansky would merely be his advisor. Jansky felt cautiously optimistic about the outcome.

When the time reached 11:55, they decided to go into the mall. For the working-class ghetto dweller, the malls were warm places available for free in the winter. On that sunny day, they were not as crowded as usual, and the group quickly walked through the first floor and headed for the escalator. The first floor contained the discount and used good stores, where Jansky still went on occasion to hunt for bargains. They reached the escalator and ascended to the second floor, where stores catered to a more affluent clientele. Even so, nobody else was dressed in a suit and tie, most dressed in casual, albeit non-tattered, clothing. He had considered wearing jeans and a light sweater but didn't want to open himself up to the accusation of "pretending to be poor." He wore a suit and tie to work every day. He wasn't going to deny it.

After walking past stores selling candy, clothing, toys, electronics, books, and houseware, they reached the "food court." Located in one corner of the building, it had large windows that let in a lot of natural light but not enough to light it fully. The mall let anyone in; they didn't want the expense of extra lighting except during the evening. Cafeteria tables covered the center of the room. On the sides were vending machines selling bread, junk food, and soups full of rice, noodles, potatoes, and sometimes meat or fish. The priciest options could be found in the stalls which sold low-quality fried meat, a luxury for the working class. The fussy and spoiled ate elsewhere. Most of those who sat at the tables and talked had not bought any food and were visibly poor by their tattered, ill-fitting, or discolored clothing. The mall tolerates "free-riding" in the hope that people who come to meet and socialize will eat or shop anyway. Jansky, in his business suit, stuck out like a sore thumb and aroused a few funny looks. But nobody rose to talk to him.

Paucek had told Jansky to meet near the vending machines. He assumed that meant the detached ones that sold junk food and candy and were at a corner near the windows. He looked to the area, and his heart sank when he

saw ghetto policemen. He counted seven and then turned to Nora and Vinov.

“Wanna turn around?” Vinov asked.

“No, if Linov wants me arrested, he’ll have me arrested. Better it occur without a fuss.”

Nora nodded at him, and he was relieved at her lack of fear. Though it may just be her ability to hide her fear, he thought.

“I think Nora should go back,” Vinov said. “I’ll linger here and report what I see to Maslak.”

Nora nodded. “Okay,” she said. “I’ll also report this to Maslak as soon as I reach the street.”

Jansky nodded, and Nora turned around and walked back the way she came. Vinov moved to the right, toward the stalls selling fried meat. Jansky continued forward alone. The funny looks continued, and, as Jansky was obviously walking toward the policemen, some began to stand up to get a better view of the “drama.” He noticed Pucek sitting at a cafeteria table in handcuffs, with policemen sitting on either side of him. He was dressed in a plain red t-shirt and stared at the ground with a bored, unemotional look. The policemen started to stare at Jansky as he walked closer. When he arrived in front of Pucek, some of the police stood up and surrounded him. Then the man to the left of Pucek spoke. “You Toma Jansky?”

“Yes,” Jansky said, nodding and attempting to project a plain look.

“You’re under arrest. Put your hands up.”

Jansky slowly did so. A policeman moved behind him, grabbed his hands forcefully, and pulled them toward his back. He then put on the cuffs.

“Check his I.D.,” said the policeman who had first spoken to Jansky, who seemed to be the one in charge.

One of the policemen put on gloves and reached into Jansky’s pocket, taking his phone and wallet and ensuring there was nothing else there. Another got a portable fingerprint scanner and placed it over Jansky’s right index finger. After a few seconds, the machine beeped and the man removed it.

“Match,” the policeman said.

“Alright, let’s head out,” said the evident leader.

Jansky was relieved they were not looking for Nora or Vinov. As he and Pucek were led through the sea of tables, dozens were looking on with great curiosity. Others were purposefully looking away or looking down, while still more continued their business casually, playing cards and joking and laughing. Jansky forced himself to smile. He realized that were he a man in the “audience,” watching a smiling man in handcuffs, his thought would be “what a moron?” But he was not like 99.9% of men in handcuffs. He was not facing permanent career damage and consoling himself with the hypothesis that a certain type of woman would find him more virile. He had friends in high places and would be out in a manner of days.

He wondered whether Pucek, walking a few paces behind him, was also

smiling. If so, could he console himself that he had a friend in a high place? It was not so unbelievable that Linov, looking through the list of pardon requests, had found and made a deal with Paucek. It would not be hard to have someone follow Jansky around and then orchestrate the “random” meeting on the bus. Still, Occam’s razor was that Paucek was exactly who he appeared to be.

As they walked to the entrance, Jansky did not see Vinov but presumed he had taken a seat in some inconspicuous place. Jansky thought he was likely headed to the “central jail” two blocks away from Maslak’s penthouse. It was possible Maslak would be there before he was. Would he see him in the lobby? No, there must be a separate entrance for arrestees.

The group walked down the escalator and then walked through the dime stores. Some looked the group over, but many others paid no attention. Seeing police lead a man away wasn’t that unusual. They walked a block away and found a waiting police van parked in an alleyway. It had probably been there all along, and it was only chance that Jansky did not see it coming. In the outside world, there was such a thing as undercover police vehicles. In the ghetto, where everything was either a bus, cargo truck, ambulance, or cop car, such a thing was unpractical.

A policeman opened the back of the car, and Jansky saw two benches facing inward. Six could sit comfortably, more so less comfortably. The section was separated from the front by an iron mesh. Jansky walked in without being asked, as did Paucek. He sat on the bench, and a cop belted the two in. Jansky could finally see Paucek and learned he was not smiling. He was frowning as if he was headed to hell. This increased the chance that he wasn’t an agent for Linov.

The trip took about five minutes, during which time the cops in the front of the van started making small talk about somebody’s wedding. Jansky and Paucek were completely silent. After they arrived, a policeman came, unbelted them, and motioned for them to move. They walked through a door and then through a hallway. When they reached a room, one of the cops said, “enter.”

First Jansky and then Paucek walked into the room. Red tiles covered the walls and there was a small window protected by iron bars that let in a little bit of sunlight. A wooden bench was offset from the wall, and Jansky and Paucek sat down while two policemen came in. They were both tall and muscular compared to the other policemen, one holding a small baseball bat and the other a taser. The floor, covered by the same red tiling as the wall, sloped gently down toward a steel drainage plug. For efficient removal of blood, Jansky thought morbidly. Behind the two policemen was a thin wooden table upon which sat a stack of gray plastic trays, the same kind as used at the Sugenlar.

The policeman with the baseball bat stood while the one with the taser walked behind them and uncuffed them. The man with the baseball bat spoke.

"Take off your belts, socks, and shoes. You," he said, pointing to Jansky, "take off your suit."

Jansky nodded. As he did so, the man took two trays and threw them at the men's feet. Jansky took off his suit, then his belt, shoes, and socks and placed them in the tray. The suit could be used for a concealed weapon, while the belt and shoelaces could be used to make a noose. But why take their socks? To make escape harder and to humiliate the detainees.

After they did so, the man standing behind them re-cuffed them.

"Go," said the man with the bat to Paucek. Paucek stood up and the two walked out the door.

A few seconds later, the man standing behind them said, "Go." Jansky stood up and followed the man out, wincing as his bare feet hit the cold tile. After a while, the man leading Jansky approached a door and stopped, while the man leading Paucek continued. The man unlocked the door and pointed to the inside of the cell. Jansky stepped in, was uncuffed, and then walked in and had the door shut behind him.

Jansky would have guessed that the cell was four feet by twelve feet. All walls were concrete, and two concrete benches were built into the longer wall. At the short end opposite the door was a toilet, with no sink and no toilet paper. There was also a small window protected by bars and a small overhead light that was turned off. Three men were sitting at the benches. One man was young, muscular, and ugly. Another was young, scrawny, and also not likely to do well as a male model. Another looked around fifty-five years old, with grey hair and a beard. All the men wore t-shirts and pants, all of which had holes in them. None looked at Jansky, who sat down beside the scrawny young man.

"What are you in for," he expected to hear. Instead, the three men did not look at him. They looked at the ground, their hands, or the toilet, not at one another. Who were they? Drunks? Thieves? Adulterers? None of them looked drunk. They couldn't be "high-level" detainees, as they would be delivered to the Kripo as soon as possible. What did they think of him, Toma Jansky? His clean-shaven face and the fact that his shirt and pants had no holes indicated that he at least had a steady job. But they probably wouldn't guess he was part of the upper class.

For about ten minutes, they sat in silence. Jansky could understand why someone wouldn't strike up a conversation under these circumstances. Even a weak and scrawny man could bite you. Jansky would have thought of himself as the type of man who would keep quiet, but at that moment, he wanted to talk. To hear these men's stories, to establish human connection.

Finally, the fifty-something man looked at Jansky and spoke. "So," he said. "What did they accuse you of?"

"Didn't say," Jansky said.

The scrawny man laughed. "Adultery, I bet."

"I'm no adulterer."

"I don't mean you cheated on your wife. But you did it with someone else's wife. Still against the law."

"I did not," Jansky said calmly. He was careful not to say he had any moral objection to adultery, though part of him wanted to do so.

"You have children?" the fiftysomething asked.

"Yes, three," Jansky said. "Two girls, one boy."

"You'll get out," the older man said in a comforting voice.

Jansky smiled. "I hope so."

"You think you'll go to a KZ?" the scrawny man asked.

"No," Jansky said.

"Yeah, adulterers generally go to the workhouse," the scrawny man said, speaking in the tone of an expert. "Unless it's really bad, then you go to a KZ."

Jansky turned to the man. "So what did they accuse you of?"

"Stealing," he said.

Jansky decided not to ask if the man was guilty, but he answered the question anyway.

"I didn't steal anything, but my boss reported me."

Before Jansky could decide how he'd respond, the door began to open. The guard who brought him in looked at Jansky. "Toma Jansky, come out," he said. Jansky stood up, grabbed his pants to prevent them from falling, and walked slowly out the door. The guard closed it behind him, then opened another, identical door directly across from the first. It opened into an identical cell, this time empty. The guard pointed to the inside of the cell. Jansky walked in and the guard closed the door behind him.

This was a good sign, Jansky thought. They didn't want him attacked by another detainee. Still, Jansky realized he had more fear of not being released than he had had as they were leading him out of the mall. The bulk of the pillar council would not look kindly on an extended imprisonment. But Linov was not a robot fated to behave as rationality dictated. He may decide this was the hill he wanted to die on.

Nazi law stated that a subhuman could not be imprisoned by his pillar for more than two weeks without "charge." After the two weeks, the prisoner could demand to be taken to a "checkpoint." The police, then, could either banish him without charge or turn him over to the Kripo with an accusation of some crime. Usually, the Kripo accepted the accusations at face value. The accused was executed or sent to a workhouse or concentration camp. On occasion, particularly for high-status detainees, they conducted their own investigation. The case of Kliment Nakhimov was most famous. A prominent figure in the insurance industry, he convinced the Kripo that the Minsk Ghetto pillar had framed him. The President and Chief of Police were shot, the pillar council dissolved, and replacements were sourced from other Russian ghettos. But this was very much a man-bites-dog story, and the threat of handover led many to prefer a fine or a few months in the ghetto's jail.

Perhaps Linov would offer him a “deal” of release in exchange for a 250 WM donation to the Winter Aid. If Jansky rejected it, he’d claim that he bent over backward to offer “leniency” but that Jansky is the type of person who refuses all compromise. Is this a man you want in your government? Jansky decided he would accept the offer and donate less come November, so long as it’s a reasonable amount.

What if Linov decided to be stubborn? Then Jansky, and Maslak on the outside, could appeal to the police. He wouldn’t try and talk up the grunts, who he knew were just following orders. But the high-level officers, and Artur Savel, were perhaps aware of the situation. Why did Linov order this man Jansky arrested? Did he do anything really bad? Is this “politics” that police are not supposed to be engaging in?

Jansky did not know any policemen other than those on the Eugenics Board, and he didn’t know them that well. None of his own family were policemen. If his friends or co-workers had brothers or cousins who were policemen, he hadn’t met them. He knew from the diaries how hated the ghetto police used to be. Some even went so far as to refer to them as “former Russians.” They were identified as servants of the Nazis, the ones who went door to door with a baton collecting the taxes. Computerization, corporatization, and the all-electronic currency freed them from this labor and their reputation improved. Still, the legacy of the early days persisted. Police mostly socialized with other police, and the job was substantially hereditary. Not all the sons of policemen went into the occupation, and a particularly good candidate or a donor to the ‘Policeman’s Mutual Aid Fund’ could join. Was this accusation of nepotism unfair? Jansky didn’t think so. He had sat through a dozen talks by policemen when he was in high school. They had ample opportunity to deny the accusations but did not do so.

The diarists identified the ghetto police as a “high” group that stepped on the masses in service of the Nazis. Many drunks still thought this way. There were still some who demanded special discounts and bribes, though it was harder with electronic currency. For the elites in Jansky’s time, the police were a “low” group to be looked down on. The job was “dirty,” and those children of the elites who went into the field were those who couldn’t cut it in the business world. This put a gap between the police and the old money elites. But the “new money” elites looked at the police in the exact same manner.

What should the police do if all they cared for was their own self-interest? Stay neutral, Jansky thought. They have a fairly good deal. Their wages are good enough. They make their own decisions on hiring and firing. If a policeman’s son wants his father’s job, it’s as good as his. If he wants a different job, all doors are open to him. Artur Savel might not be part of the “old money aristocratic class” in a strict sense, but his son could get into A.G. Club. The policeman has access to an athletic center funded by the pillar that is open to his family and to him in retirement. He knows the elites look down

on him, but he doesn't need to care, for he can withdraw into the insular social world of the Policeman's Social Club, where he quite likely met his wife, the sister of another policeman. If he's a low-ranking policeman, he knows the higher levels are somewhat nepotistic. But it has not reached the levels of the rest of the pillar, as many sons of high-ranking policemen do not go into the field, opening places at the top. Of the last six police chiefs, only two shared a last name.

Across regimes and times, it was common for there to be a norm where the police or military "do not involve themselves in politics." It was easy to see why other power brokers would want to keep the Armed Men out. It's less immediately obvious why the Armed Men would foster the norm themselves. But there was a logic to it. The leader of the Armed Men wants to know that whoever grabs the crown will maintain him in his position. Only if someone makes noises about cutting their funding will the Armed Men act.

Jansky's point would be that the police should be neutral, for their own benefit and for everyone else's. Neutrality would mean releasing him. You should not be involved in this succession dispute and should resent Linov's attempt to involve you in it. He imagined the Top Cop thinking, "if Linov were to put this man Jansky on trial, the determination of his guilt or innocence would be the court's decision, and we'd do our duty in arresting him and imposing the court's punishment. And if Linov wanted to expel him, as he's legally entitled to do, we'd enforce the expulsion order. But he wants to use us as a means of pure intimidation, having us arrest his political rival on vague charges and not put him on trial. This is involving us in politics, placing us in a position where this man Jansky may be angry at us were his faction to triumph. But this man Jansky says he understands our perspective and promises he isn't angry with us. He's an OK kind of guy, even if he seems nerdy and not very tough."

It would be an uphill battle. The inherent conservatism of the police would incline them toward favoring the President over some unknown, low-ranking finance man. He would tell them to talk to Yuri Maslak and Alik Yumatov, council members who would only have good things to say about him. He was just like them, playing by the rules, working within the system, yet looked down on by the ghetto nobility, personified at the top by Anton Linov. Jansky would make this case, but only to a high-ranking man. To the low-ranking grunts, he would be callow and obedient.

Jansky sat in the cell for about six hours. He used the toilet. Thankfully he did not need toilet paper. As the sun went down, the cell got darker and darker, but the light above him remained off. Finally, the door opened, and Jansky stood at attention, holding his pants to prevent them from falling. The policeman who faced him was tall, blond-haired, and handsome. "Artur Savel wants to talk to you," he said. He looked honestly confused as to what was happening and a little concerned. But he didn't seem apologetic, like the police had "arrested the wrong man."

Jansky smiled ever so slightly and followed the man. He winced again as his bare feet hit the cold floor. He walked past more cells and up a flight of stairs, where they continued into a hallway that resembled a normal office building with tiled floors and wooden doors. The doors were labeled “interview room 1,” and so on. There was a policeman’s joke about the naming. “The Nazis do interrogations. We do interviews. They aren’t the same thing because we don’t call them the same thing.”

The man opened the door to “interview room 3,” and Jansky walked in. The room was small, with a table and three chairs, two padded, the other plain metal, bolted to the ground. To Jansky’s left was an ancient television, DVD player, and VCR. To the right was a metal file cabinet. In one chair facing him was Artur Savel. The neighboring chair was empty. Jansky sat down on the plain metal chair that faced Savel, and the tall blond policeman closed the door. He was surprised they didn’t cuff him.

Artur Savel was dressed in the same policeman’s uniform he wore to all the meetings of the Eugenics Board. The contrast between him and Jansky, barefoot, in a t-shirt, and unable to even keep his pants up, was stark. He wondered what kind of torture devices may lie in the file cabinet. Savel smiled, a smile that lent Jansky a powerful feeling of relief.

“So,” Savel said, “how was your stay here?”

“Fine,” Jansky said, plainly. He paused for a second before adding, “all the policemen behaved correctly and decently.”

Savel’s facial expression seemed to hint to Jansky that he couldn’t care less what Jansky thought was “decent” and “correct.” But he didn’t say anything and the two were silent for some time.

“So what happens now,” Jansky said.

“That depends on my judgment of whether you represent a threat to the stability of the ghetto.”

A chill went down Jansky’s spine.

“You see,” said Savel, no longer smiling. “People seem to have this idea that there’s some kind of constitution which gives Russians in the ghettos certain rights. Like the right to not be arrested for no reason. Such a constitution does not exist and we’ve never pretended that it does, so I’m mystified as to where people get such an idea.”

Jansky thought about responding with, “why did Linov order my arrest?” But if Savel was to portray it as his idea, Jansky would play along, at least for a while. “Why did you judge my behavior as deserving of arrest?”

“Because we can’t tolerate public debates in the ghetto. We can argue privately at Yamel as we do on the Eugenics Board. Not in public.”

Jansky was heartened by the fact that Savel called it the “eugenics board,” the unofficial short-form name he had suggested. “Why not? Because of the Kripo?”

“Kripo’s one reason, and not the main one. We do not take popular opinion into consideration when we make policy. That’s the reality. And

people are mad at us for not listening to them. But you know what will make them even madder? If we pretend we listen to them but then they realize we aren't."

"So I cannot even argue for the pillar's current policy?"

"Yes, you cannot even argue for the pillar's current policy. If you were some nobody arguing with some nobody, it'd be fine. But you speak for the pillar now. Even if you resign from the Eugenics Board, you will still be seen as a man speaking for the pillar. You want to be a private citizen again; you'll have to move to another ghetto."

"I understand," Jansky said in a kind tone. It was a weasely way of seeming to say you'll follow a rule without actually saying so.

"You know Hitler did the same thing as you're doing," Savel said. "The elites were afraid of the people. And he was a man of the people, from a humble background, who had fought as an ordinary front soldier. He offered himself to them as a populist in content but an elitist at heart. A man who could protect their interests. And the instability the elites were afraid of? Well, he went out and created more of it. Started a lot of fights in the streets, then told the elites he'd restore 'order.' You do the same thing. Create the perception that there's gonna be this big problem with enforcement of the productivization mandate, then offer yourself as the man with the iron will who will solve it."

Jansky was surprised at Savel's intelligence, though he realized he could just be repeating a line someone else came up with. He smiled. "Being compared to Hitler, that's like a knife in the heart. I'd make the same insult toward you considering your position, though I'm sure you're inured to it by now." He spoke with a playful and sarcastic tone as if they were old friends arguing about something relatively unimportant. He couldn't just come out and say, "I have no beef with the police, only with Linov," as it would look like obvious manipulation. He would imply it with words and deeds.

"I haven't heard it for a while. This is the first time in years that I've personally interrogated a suspect. But I'm sure they say it behind my back."

"A suspect,' you say? I'm suspected of what?"

"Activity injurious to the interests of the North Kyiv Ghetto."

"Is this really about an argument in the mall?" Jansky asked. "Or is it about something else?" He spoke in a plain and tired voice, hoping he didn't sound threatening.

Savel rolled his eyes. "Okay, tell me what it's *really* about."

"Taras Linov."

"What about him?"

"People believe he's unfit to lead the ghetto. And as much as some might want to say people believe that because so and so started saying it, I think the root cause of the belief is the man's behavior."

"I arrested you because I judged your behavior to be injurious to the ghetto. I don't get involved in politics." His tone sounded less than sincere,

and Jansky didn't think he was making much effort to feign sincerity.

"I understand," Jansky said. "I really do. But what happens when you receive an order you believe is intended to create the perception that you are involved in politics? Anton Linov has the right to declare me an undesirable and expel me from the ghetto. Why hasn't he done so? Because there are lots of people who know that what I'm saying about Taras Linov and the productivization mandate is true. They don't want to see me thrown out of the ghetto for saying it. So Linov must resort to indirect measures of intimidation to try and get his way."

"I don't believe that," Savel said firmly. "You know what smart people who are afraid of their government do? They keep a *low profile*. And you're smart. You've got a wife, kids, a good job, lots of friends, many things to do other than argue with randos on the bus. You did it because you wanted to further your persona as a man who's not afraid of the masses. And now you want to pin your arrest on Linov."

Jansky said nothing for some time. "Not everything is an act, a persona. My father really was a pharmacist. That's not part of some narrative I turned up. It's a fact. When I was a kid, some of my friends were the children of bakers and construction workers. I've long spent time debating issues with 'the people.' And nobody told me when I was appointed to the Eugenics Board that I couldn't do that anymore."

The claim that some of his childhood friends were of working-class background was false, though not falsifiable. For a second, Savel seemed a bit taken aback by it, though his look of firmness soon returned.

"The thing is, Jansky, you're at a level where it's expected that these things don't need to be explained. That you're smart enough to grasp the 'unwritten rules.' I know you've got the idea that you are head and shoulders above the rest of us in your 'political' skills and that if you do fail, it will be because we were 'born on third base' and you weren't. But you know why Taras Linov is gonna get elected President and not Yuri Maslak?"

"Why?"

"Because Taras Linov wants to use the office to bed a lot of women. And collect a salary. He doesn't want anything else from us. Whereas your man Yuri Maslak, he's been spending decades saying, 'this bureaucracy is corrupt, this bureaucracy is wasting labor, this man is unqualified for his job.' And you're replicating that."

Jansky did not expect this response and had to admit that Savel had a point. He wanted to respond with, "well, it doesn't have to be Maslak or Linov." But he didn't want to give the impression he would easily break with Maslak. "There's a term for that, you know," Jansky said. "Negative selection. Raise up an incompetent man who can't threaten you, who's not going to criticize your performance because he knows he's just a flunky. The problem is that he's not going to hold his subordinates to high standards either. So you get incompetence all down the chain."

"I'm too busy to read up on political theory, but that doesn't surprise me," Savel said.

"As to why I engaged in that argument," Jansky continued, "it's a bad idea to let bad ideas go unchallenged. Is it true that people send in tips to the Gestapo that so-and-so is a crypto-Jew?"

"Yes. It's also true that the Gestapo ignores those tips."

Jansky nodded. "We should be thankful they don't fall for that crap. But other bad ideas could be far more harmful. You know people have told me, 'oh, the productivization mandate, why worry about it? The Nazis won't be able to enforce it, and Litzer's gonna go on TV and walk it back.' This is not psychoanalytic speculation on my part. I've heard it directly."

Jansky had not heard it but could, if pressed, give names. People who would, if asked, deny they'd ever said it, but then you'd expect them to do that. And Savel would expect nobody to say such things to the Chief of Police. Maybe he'd ask his wife, but then, nobody would say it to the wife of the Chief of Police either.

Savel looked down, almost ashamed, for the first time in their conversation. "I honestly don't know what will happen with the mandate," Savel said. "But I know you and Yuri Maslak have every incentive to exaggerate the threat."

"And Linov has every incentive to downplay it."

"Yes," Savel said. "I also know that our non-involvement in politics is inherently imperfect. We have a voting seat on the council. I will have to make a vote, and I become Acting President the moment Linov dies or retires. But right now, I'm still more concerned with your erratic behavior than with Taras Linov's." He spoke firmly but not all that confidently.

"Really," Jansky said. "My behavior offends the policeman's sense of order more than Taras's?"

"Yes. I have yet to receive any report from any victim of Taras Linov's supposed violent actions. The victims of these crimes, if they exist, do not want police involvement."

"Are you familiar with the concept of feigned skepticism?" asked Jansky

"No, but do tell," Savel said in a disinterested tone.

"It's the rhetorical technique you just used there. 'Supposed violent actions.' 'Accusations.' 'Allegations.' 'Unproven.' 'Nobody has complained.' I don't think you have any real doubt that the accusations against Taras Linov are true. But you use the language of skepticism regardless to justify inaction."

Savel rolled his eyes.

"As to Taras Linov, I'm not asking you to arrest him, just to exercise the right granted to you by the Nazis to not elect him as President."

"The problem is, Jansky, nobody's gonna believe that. Nobody thinks that once they grant you this thing, you're not going to immediately make some other demand. Your ultimate goal is to purge the pillar and fill it with your

friends.”

Jansky was silent for a second and spoke in a quiet voice. “What I’d like is for the government to be made up of people qualified for their jobs. I’m sure you’ve entertained the idea as well.” The police were, by the standards of the bureaucracy, relatively meritocratic. Savel knew it. He seemed to look confused and unsure, but only for a moment.

Savel then looked firmly at him. “Ever since you joined the board, I’ve been looking into you, Maslak, and the Glanzia Forum. Asking around. Collecting bits of information. I learned some things. Like the fact that of the Russians in your firm, every single member is part of your little club. And the CEO hired her son. Are those things coincidences?”

“Not coincidences. I was invited to the Glanzia Forum because I impressed Ivan Vinov with my skill in analyzing the stonk market. I was hired at Dador Capital for the same reason.”

Savel smiled. “*Stonk* market?”

“It’s an Anglicism.”

Savel chuckled. “So it is,” he said. His face returned to a look of seriousness. “So you’re a meritocrat? Is Maxim Semko?”

“Yes. It’s not a coincidence. His mother and father are both very smart, and so is he.”

“He didn’t regress toward the mean?”

Jansky was surprised Savel knew that phrase. “No.”

“Well, what if your kids do, Jansky? Are you really going to hire the son of a stranger because he is smarter instead of your own flesh and blood?”

“I will hire the best man for the job,” Jansky said. “My children will inherit my money. They do not need to inherit my job. People need to stop seeing jobs, particularly jobs for the pillar, as their personal property.”

“Good luck convincing people to believe that,” Savel said.

“I might need it,” Jansky admitted.

Savel smiled.

“You want to hear a maximally cynical theory of why this all is happening?” Jansky asked.

“Go ahead,” Savel said. This time he seemed interested.

“The people who want to wait and see, who won’t say who they’ll elect as Linov’s successor, they do this to increase their own leverage, bargaining power.”

“Yeah, basically,” Savel said.

Jansky was taken aback by the response. Was Savel implying the other swing votes were doing this or was he admitting to doing it himself? Perhaps he could justify it to himself. Securing funding for the police was a noble cause that could justify Machevelian behavior.

“So anyway,” Savel said, “I take it you’ve been here long enough. If I get your word that there will be no more public debates about any subject, you’re free to go.”

Jansky did not need to give it any thought. “You have my word. No more public debates about any subject.”

“Alright. I have one more question for you. Do you think a democratic system would be better?” Savel’s tone was half-serious. Presumably, he realized one’s opinions about the subject did not matter, that they were talking about la-la-land.

“All told, I do,” Jansky said. “I would never advocate democracy in public, of course.”

“I don’t. Remember high school, Jansky? Ask yourself who the most popular kids were. Who got the most attention from girls? Was it the smartest? The nicest? Those who worked the hardest? Democracy would be a competition of blowhards making shortsighted and unrealistic promises. Ginning up controversy for no reason. Inciting anger, hatred, and division in the populace, turning rich and poor, old and young, men and women against one another. The justification for a monarchical system isn’t that the monarch is magically better than anyone else. It’s that it neutralizes this destructive process of competition. Nobody needs to worry about how they’ll accommodate the regime change that occurs every four years.”

“You’d make a decent writer for the Propaganda Ministry,” Jansky said. “In Berlin, one can get a job as a ‘secretary,’ or ‘proofreader’ for a German.”

Savel smiled. “You know the Nazis also believe in this ‘round-earth theory?’”

“I guess you’ve got a point there,” Jansky said.

“They won the war.”

“Got a point there, too,” Jansky said. He meant it honestly, though he was also trying to signal friendliness. They were both silent for some seconds, as neither wanted to continue the discussion. “What about my sparring partner?” Jansky asked.

“He’s got a record. I’m gonna keep him in for a while.”

This was Jansky’s final confirmation that his meeting with Paucek really had been random. The theory that Linov organized Paucek’s ‘random’ meeting with Jansky and then feigned a harsh but sort-of-friendly meeting between him and Savel seemed too convoluted. The theory that he did so without Savel’s cooperation, telling Paucek to accept an arrest and incarceration in silence, was even less likely. He pondered whether he should try and help Paucek. Ethics told him to and a part of him thought making a stand would impress Savel by signaling his toughness. But the more self-interested part of his brain was screaming, “get out of there, you f***ing moron!”

Before Jansky could decide on what to do, Savel spoke. “Would you like to remain in jail out of solidarity with him, the true democrat that you are?”

“No,” Jansky said. “My wife is probably worried sick.” He spoke plainly and unemotionally, or at least hoped he did. And for the first time, he thought he saw a hint of guilt in Artur Savel. A second later, the “hard policeman”

look returned.

“Alright,” Savel said. He reached down and pulled out his walkie-talkie, clicking it and speaking into it. “Get Toma Jansky’s stuff ready for his release. We’ll be there in a second.”

Savel stood up at the same time as Jansky did. For a second, Jansky considered reaching forward to shake the man’s hand but thought better of it. “Follow me,” Savel said.

Savel opened the door, and they walked back down the stairwell and through another cell block. It was the “juvenile section,” with the same doors as before. They walked through and arrived at a large, heavily secured door. Savel briefly looked back and forth before he placed his finger in a scanner and waited about thirty seconds before a sound rang out, presumably unlocking the door. He opened it, and they walked through.

The room had two normal, unsecured doors labeled “I” and “E,” which Jansky read to mean “internal” and “external.” Presumably, one led to the policemen’s offices, the other to the outside world. There was no more need for heavy security as anyone brought out was presumably being released. To Jansky’s right was a desk protected by a wired glass window, behind which sat a policeman. There was a computer and some magazines on the policeman’s desk and a door behind him. The walls were the same plain and harsh concrete as the inside of the prison. Jansky assumed the policemen’s offices would be different. As soon as Jansky walked through, Savel continued and then walked through the “I” door, which opened without delay. Jansky was surprised he didn’t shake his hand, wish him well, or threaten him. But it made sense. What he said in the interrogation room was unlikely to leave it, and he could always claim he was playing the “good cop” game. On the outside, he couldn’t look too friendly.

On Jansky’s side of the desk were two steel chairs bolted to the ground, and Jansky took a seat in one of them. A fingerprint scanner was bolted into the window, and the policeman signaled for Jansky to put his finger in it. Jansky did so, and it “clicked” after about eight seconds. The policeman then stood up and went into a room behind him. A minute later, he brought out a gray tray and dumped the contents, Jansky’s stuff, into a clear plastic container. He then pushed the container through, making them accessible to Jansky. Jansky took it and put his socks and shoes on, tightened his belt, and then put on his suit but kept his red tie in his pocket. The man behind the counter seemed amused by the situation, though he didn’t say anything. Once Jansky was finished, the man appeared to push a button, which made a sound that came from the “E” door. The man pointed to it, and Jansky went and opened it. To his surprise, it opened to the outside. He was free.

He went home to Nora, who was surprisingly unphased by the arrest.

The next morning, he got a knock on his door. He opened it and found it was Pavlov. Thankfully Nora had already taken the children to school, so he didn’t need to explain who he was. Pavlov simply handed him a note, smiled,

and left. Jansky unwrapped it and read it. It had been typed in what Jansky thought was size 30 font, like a child would use.

"I previously told you you could not leave the ghetto. If you want to do so now, you have my blessing. If you remain and continue your current path, there will be consequences, not just for yourself. -You know who."

Jansky smiled and wished Pavlov a nice day. He had no intention of leaving the ghetto.

Chapter 16

Toma Jansky was in a good mood on the morning of Wednesday, April 24, 2097. He was eating a bowl of corn flakes and smiling as he remembered a particularly funny German comedy he had watched the night before. He had kept meeting prominents and had ceased writing reports for Linov, who did nothing to retaliate against him. He felt both proud and guilty for a successful rumor he had started. It was to his political advantage, but he was haunted by the fear it would induce nightmares in little girls. And he was being blamed for the rumor, though he both denied starting it and denied believing in it. In a sense, he hadn't started it; Maslak did. He just came up with the idea during a brainstorming session.

The subject of the rumor, the miniseries *Saint-Domingue*, featured little that was new. All the stock characters were there. The abusive Bavarian Catholic priest, a German who served a "Jewish" agenda and helped to keep Germany divided and poor. The good-natured but incompetent Bavarian aristocrat. The handsome hero of Nordic appearance and working or middle-class origin. In the world of *Saint-Domingue*, he is doctor Josef Esser, a Bavarian who seeks his fortune in France's Caribbean colony. The French are cultured but decadent and ignore Esser's warnings that the runaway slaves, armed and led by the British, will return to lead a slave revolt. The British blockade the colony and the revolt occurs, with most of the French immediately killed by the bestial, animalistic blacks. But the unintelligence of the blacks allows Esser and several hundred whites to escape to the forests. Onto the island comes the London Jew, Issac Cohen, who wears a British uniform though he is too cowardly to fight. Cohen urges the blacks to go into the forests to finish the genocide, but the blacks, lazy and fatalistic, ignore him.

Eventually, the whites are captured, but the mulatto leaders, halfway between man and beast, are convinced by Esser that they should hold them for ransom rather than kill them. Esser sets off to the neighboring French colonies to communicate the ransom demands. They agree to raise funds but tell Esser it will take time. Esser, having promised to return and rejoin the captives, does so. But Cohen convinces British admiral Angus Powell to interdict any ship bringing the ransom, leading to the massacre of the prisoners, though Esser manages to escape. He then kills a British sailor and steals his uniform, going to the temporary headquarters of Powell, who is overseeing the evacuation of the British now that the "objective" has been accomplished. Essen holds Powell at gunpoint and forces him to walk to the mass grave, which Powell had turned away from during the massacre. After forcing him to view the bodies, he threatens the Britons with the same fate if they continue to "act as the tools of Jewry." A moment later, a group of blacks arrive and Essen attempts to escape but is outrun and beaten to death. At the end of the series is

the eternal mantra. “1918. Never Again!”

Toma Jansky knew what it meant. In the Nazi fairy tale for grown-up children, Germany lost the war in 1918 because they allowed “Jewish subversion” to run rampant in their society, tricking them with the lie of “Wilsonian self-determination.” In 1941, Jewry planned a similar “war of destruction,” with the “Moscow steamroller” scheduled to activate in July 1941, trapping Germany between Russia and Britain. Germany acted first, crushed Russia, and gave the Jewish architects of the plot the punishment they had planned for Germany. It was verboten to say, in public, a statement as simple as “the Nazis exterminated the Jews.” They merely “disappeared,” were “swept up in the fire they had started,” were “made extinct in the tide of history.” It was spoken of as if genocide was a normal and inevitable outcome of war, though anyone who studied war would know otherwise. The message of works like *Saint-Domingue* and the slogan “Never Again” was that there would be no “armistice at Compiègne” in the event of a “fourth war.” Whatever group rebelled would find itself exterminated.

Many Russians did not know that “history.” They would recognize “Never Again!” as a Nazi propaganda slogan, having seen it on posters and billboards outside the ghetto. But they wouldn’t be able to tell you what “1918” referred to. They couldn’t tell you when WWI started or ended, let alone Nazism’s false history. They were oblivious to the fact that a hundred censors had poured over every bit of photography and dialogue in *Saint-Domingue*, checking it for ideological correctness, making sure all of it reflected the “national socialist worldview,” that none of it reflected “outdated and wrongheaded notions.” To them, it was just an entertaining TV program. It would be nice if these people were only grocery haulers, pipe-fitters, busboys. Unfortunately, some of them were in positions where their ignorance of the outside world could be actively harmful. Some of them whispered in the ears of council members like Vladimir Averin, Roman Shvets, and Yana Kobzar.

Their ignorance provided an opportunity, a canvas upon which one can paint his own narrative. The threat of *Saint-Domingue* was mostly directed against the Anglo-Americans. It was also an implicit threat to the other groups the Germans might fear, such as the more numerous Chinese and Indians. It was not directed against Russians for the simple reason that the Nazis did not see any need to fear them. They were, the Nazis said over and over, under “control.” But an ignorant Russian, seeing the last chilling scene of the mass grave, might think those mangled white bodies lying in the mass grave could be Russian. That the movie was an implicit threat against Russians that if they did not “cooperate,” their pillar would be dissolved and “bestial” Africans brought in to run it. The idea was wrong in light of certain facts but wasn’t inherently fallacious or self-contradictory. Jansky didn’t know how Maslak “got the ball rolling” on the idea. Perhaps he whispered it in the ear of some stupid friend, then preserved plausible deniability by saying he was joking.

The friend, thinking the idea brilliant, decided to scream it from the rooftops as his own idea. However it started, it spread like wildfire.

As he was almost finished with his bowl of corn flakes, his phone vibrated with a text message. He ate a few more bites and then checked the message. It was from Maslak. He opened it, read it, and froze.

“Kripo raid today. Stay inside.”

He turned to his wife, who was nursing baby Ivan. She could see the look of dread on his face. “What’s wrong?”

He looked back at his phone. “I just got a message from Maslak. ‘Kripo raid today. Stay inside.’ That’s all it says.”

“Too bad it’s on a workday,” she said in a fatalistic tone.

He nodded, then began looking around. Not knowing about the bunker beneath Yamel, the stakes didn’t seem as high to her as they did to him.

“Though it’s a good thing we heard about it before we dropped off Lida,” he said. Jansky’s eldest daughter had finished her bowl of corn flakes a minute earlier and was in the children’s room. He walked to her and found her using crayons to copy a scene from a picture book.

“You won’t need to go to school today.”

“Aww,” she said, wounded. Lida enjoyed school, which at her young age was pure fun and no hassle.

“There’s going to be a Kripo raid today,” he said, attempting an ordinary tone of voice.

“People get shot in those,” she said in a matter-of-fact tone.

He was surprised she knew what Kripo raids were. He recognized she was trying to impress him with her recall of facts. He wasn’t sure if he should pat her on the head or not. “Nobody here is going to get shot,” he said.

“Good,” she said, smiling.

Her development of critical thinking skills could wait until later, he thought.

“We will need you to play in the living room, near to me, mommy, Olya, and Ivan,” he said. Maslak had not told them when the Kripo would enter the ghetto. They could be at his doorstep right then.

“Okay,” she said. She picked up the crayons, picture book, and pad of paper. After a few seconds, she stopped and looked at him skeptically. “Why?” she asked.

“In a Kripo raid, everyone needs to be in a single place,” he said.

For a few seconds, she looked to be contemplating, but then said “okay” and walked with her crayons and books out to the living room. He was relieved he didn’t need to explain it.

Lida set up camp on the floor next to Nora, who was on the couch nursing Ivan. Olya was sitting next to them and playing with an abacus. Jansky went to his room, opened the dresser drawers and closet door, and then did the same for the children’s room. He then went to the bathroom, opened the cabinets, and pushed the shower curtain to the side. Then he went to the

kitchen, opened all the cabinets, and unlocked the front door. Next, he stacked up the chairs in the living-dining room. There was a script everyone knew to follow. If the Kripo men arrived, every family member would be sitting in one place. They would all put their hands in the air and announce that there was no one else in the house. The raiders would not need to open anything and the search would be over as quickly as possible. If the purpose was to find fugitives and contraband, it would be much more effective to do many smaller raids than a few big ones. But that wasn't the raids' purpose. They were to scare the Russians and make the Germans feel like warriors.

He hadn't been this worried the last time there was a Kripo raid, before Maslak, the time capsule, and the Bogeyman. He hoped the worry didn't show. Olya showed no awareness that anything was amiss. Lida knew that something was up but didn't seem bothered. She was probably just rolling her eyes at the adults engaging in a strange adult ritual for some strange adult reason.

After they finished, Toma and Nora returned to the couch and sat down with the children.

"You want to watch a movie?" asked Nora.

"Sure," he said. They had been planning to watch the new action movie about the Peninsular War. But that wouldn't be appropriate in front of the children, particularly given the present situation. "You want to watch *The Sanner Inequality*?" he asked.

"Sure," Nora replied.

She turned on the TV, navigated to the movie, and set it to play. *The Sanner Inequality* was a documentary about interpretations of quantum mechanics. From the start, the movie looked to be a disappointment, and after forty minutes, he turned uneasily toward Nora. "What do you think?" he asked.

"Stupid," she said.

"Agreed," he said. It was a production of the politically connected Jaeger Group, which meant it got rave reviews in the media. One couldn't automatically dismiss it on this basis, as some *Jaeger Group* documentaries were quite good. Toma and Nora went into the bedroom and got books, him a recent German science fiction book and her a Chinese novel set in the eighteenth century. They returned to the couch and read in silence that was occasionally punctuated by bursts of crying from Ivan.

After one particularly annoying bout of crying, Lida looked to Nora. "Why can't I go to my room?" she asked.

"You know the Nazis?" Nora asked.

"The people who oppress us and take our stuff?"

"Yes," Nora said, nodding. "They want us to all be in a single room."

"But why?"

"Because they're crazy, that's why."

Lida frowned. Perhaps she had imagined she could talk them into letting

her go to her room. Perhaps she doubted the ‘they’re crazy’ explanation, deducing that there was a “real reason” the adults were keeping from her.

After an hour, Nora got a text message. She read it and then looked to Toma. “From Kira,” she said. “They’ll be here soon,” she said, pointing to the window.

Toma stood up and walked to the window, pushing the blinds over and looking out. The road was eerily clear of people. In the building across the street were a few people looking downwards. He imagined that more were looking through thin slits in their blinds. He opened the window, felt the rush of fresh air on his face, and heard the faint sound of music in the distance. He turned back to Nora. “Are you going to watch the parade?” he asked.

“No,” she said. “It’s like they win if we do so.”

He turned back and stared at the street. “They already won by forcing us inside,” he said. “They won a century ago when they pushed the button first.” He turned to Lida, wondering if she’d ask him what ‘push the button’ meant. But she was immersed in her coloring book, uninterested in the adult drama.

“I can see how your pose could be defiant, that they win if we all cower, afraid,” Nora said. “Though the real act of bravery would be to face them in the street. Is anyone doing that?”

“Not a single soul, not even a policeman,” he said.

“You know people used to watch the street, back in the days when there were bazaars, food stands, lots of children playing,” Nora said. “Back before radio and television. It must have been a very boring life.”

“Yes. Vinov has occasionally toyed with the idea that one reason we see so much mental anguish in the modern world is because we are overstimulated. With art, music, television, books, varieties of food, P-O-R-N, and even certain colors that rarely occur in nature. Of course, it’s very much still worth it.”

“Indeed.”

As the music got louder, he recognized it as the Horst Wessel Song. After a few minutes, the parade turned a corner and began coming down his street. At the front were the men of the elite Waffen-SS, dressed in gray. In the center was a black Mercedes, presumably seating the leadership, with boom boxes attached to the sides and miniature Nazi flags attached to the front. Marching on either side of the Mercedes were men dressed in black uniforms of the Kripo. Following was a much larger group of men in green, ordinary Wehrmacht conscripts serving their time. As the group came closer, he could make out the song’s lyrics. “Clear the streets for the brown battalions! Clear the streets for the storm division man!” Anyone who had regularly gone through the Sugenlar knew the song by heart.

After the parade turned another quarter, he sat back down on the couch and resumed reading. *Inception Point* was an enjoyable novel written by a Frenchman in the German language. Like most science fiction novels, the setting was a dystopian “anarchic world” full of clans around a distant

asteroid belt warring with and enslaving one another. Torture, rape, and the taking and murder of children as hostages were normal occurrences. The protagonist might get caught up in the “adventure” of it all, but it was inevitable that tragedy would strike him eventually. The message was simple: one could choose between an oppressive, organized world and an oppressive, disorganized world. Even the poorest Russian ought to be glad they have the ghetto police protecting them and the Winter Aid supporting them.

As Jansky was thinking about the genre, he was interrupted by Lida. “Daddy, why don’t we hide?”

He smiled. “That would be illegal,” he said. “And anyway, they’d find us quickly.” Some people, most often women afraid of being raped, did hide. Unless one had a hiding place like the bunker under Yamel, doing so was the height of stupidity.

Lida seemed to accept that and didn’t ask any more questions.

At noon, Nora put lunch in the microwave, then quickly returned to the couch.

By 7 p.m., Jansky got a text message from Maslak saying he had a “good day.” This was code for “the raid is over,” but that didn’t mean the fear was entirely over. Nazi “stragglers” were known to stay behind. But they did let Olya and Lida go to their room.

“You know the purge the Spartans did every year, against the helots?” Nora asked, looking to Toma. The kids were gone and they could talk about adult subjects.

“No,” he said.

Nora looked surprised, as usually he was the one who knew more about history. “Well, every autumn the Spartans would declare war on the helots. It was a rite of passage for every Spartan warrior to kill a male helot.”

“Sounds like Nazi bulls*** to me,” he said.

“Really,” Nora said. “You think they lie about the ancient world?”

“Yes. They ant to normalize their own social system. I read a book about the ancient world, can’t remember the title, but it had ten ancient societies, Persia, China, Rome, and one chapter on Sparta. The way the Spartans treated the helots seemed pointlessly brutal. If other ancient societies operated on the same principles, I could believe Sparta did. But they didn’t, they had brutally treated slave castes, but they made up 1% of the population, not ninety. Societies, like anything else, can be put on a bell curve. The most extreme member will be different from the average, but it won’t be *that* different from the second most extreme member. Graph ancient societies on the level of how militaristic and how oppressive they are to the majority of their people. Most societies fit nicely on the bell curve, except for Sparta, which is eight standard deviations away from the average. What’s the most logical explanation? That it *wasn’t* eight standard deviations away from the average.”

Nora smiled. “I wonder if our descendants in a thousand years will doubt that the Atlantic slave trade happened.”

“Maybe,” Toma said. Not if the time capsule can help it, he thought.

“Anyway, I was going to ask if you’ve ever heard the Spartan coming of age ritual compared to the Kripo raids.”

“Well,” he said, “suspending my disbelief in the former, I suppose there is some similarity. But a big difference. Between foreign enemies and the mass of terrorized slaves, the Spartans were right to worry about their throats being slit. They’d fear the helots. The Germans don’t fear us. They’re not here looking for ‘contraband,’ not really. The whole thing’s just a tourist expedition.”

“Yeah, I can definitely see that,” Nora said. “You know the Germans compete among themselves to find the most obscure places to visit, places that haven’t been ‘ruined by tourists.’ They’ll say things like, ‘oh, France and Italy are too touristy; go instead to Libya or Morocco.’ Maybe in a generation those places will be touristy too, and they’ll be going to Ethiopia and the French Sudan.”

“Very alien to our thought process, but I guess when you’re that rich, you have to scrape the bottom of the barrel looking for novel experiences,” he said.

“Yep. You can imagine the German boy telling his girlfriend about partaking in a raid. It’s the ultimate tourist experience; this place they can be certain is not “set up for German tourists.” It’s also the most exotic, a place that’s never on the travel documentary. The boyfriend knows the girlfriend will never go there and can only experience it through his account. He says, ‘yeah, one day I’m sitting on the base in Pommerania, and suddenly I hear the siren go off. We run for the busses, drive to the airport, and touch down in Kyiv in full combat gear. We get on more buses and drive to the ghetto. Finally, we go in, break down the doors, house-to-house. I didn’t understand how massive the ghetto would be. The gigantic towers, the strangely-named streets, it was disorienting, and...’”

“It was our generation’s battle of Moscow,” Toma said in a mocking voice.

“Oh yeah,” Nora said, still in the German’s voice. “I was afraid, but I told myself I had to be brave for the sake of my brothers. We barely got out of there alive.”

He laughed.

“And the thing about it is, she knows it’s all bullshit, that they weren’t in any real danger, and he knows that she knows it. But it’s fun play-acting regardless. He gets the cachet of the warrior who has traveled to all these exotic locations, fought all these exotic enemies. She gets to play the doe-eyed girl thankful that her heroic white knight has gone out to foreign lands and has slain the dragon that could have threatened her.”

He nodded.

Later that week, Toma learned that an unusually high number of people had been killed in the Kripo raid that day. The number the public knew was

eighty-seven, which Savel, during the Eugenics Board meeting, said was indeed correct. Maslak denied leaking it; Jansky wasn't sure if he was telling the truth. Everyone connected it to the Bogeyman. Jansky didn't attempt to talk anyone out of doing so.

And the pretext for the raid? Their names were Yaro Kulikov and Viktor Dasenko. They worked as waiters in a middle-market restaurant about five miles from the ghetto. On the morning of May 29, 2093, they left the ghetto for work. They did not clock in nor return to the ghetto that night. After a few days, their parents and siblings were arrested and sent to concentration camps. They later arrived in Oldham, England, a suburb of Manchester. The news reports don't say how they got there. It was impossible to board a civilian train without having one's prints taken, so Jansky assumed they hopped a freight train and then crossed into France. There they either passed through the channel tunnel, hoped a cargo ship, or bribed a Frenchman to ferry them across the channel.

The media didn't say anything about the lives they lived during their four years in Oldham, except that they claimed to be Americans from Boston, Massachusetts. It was unlikely they were doing particularly well, for Oldham was a poorer-than-average area in a poorer-than-average region. Unlike London, the North of England never really recovered from the nuking of 1969. Jansky had once been on the bus when he overheard the whispers of a Briton and an East Asian, speaking in German. The Briton claimed that North England was a "skeptical" area, "skeptical" being code for "anti-Nazi." Perhaps Kulikov and Dasenko heard the same thing, assuming local authorities would be less enthusiastic about checking papers, irises, and fingerprints. This may have been a smart decision. Claiming to be from Boston was certainly not, as anyone who was really from Boston could ask them about neighborhoods or landmarks in the city. They should have claimed to be from a small town.

Children sometimes ask why more people don't go to Germany and live as Germans. Most Russians can speak German with no accent, and the "Slavic" head shape was found among many in the south and east of Germany. But it was only a matter of time before a man gets stopped and asked for his ID and fingerprints. A "monthly" occurrence on the street and a "daily" occurrence if one wants to go to the amusement park, symphony, or N.S.D.A.P house. In England, one can survive longer, but not indefinitely. The news reports didn't say how Kulikov and Dasenko were captured. But the man responsible was feted as a hero. Samuel Burton was thirty-one years old, with combed-over black hair and brown eyes, somewhat handsome. He was a low-level police officer, so he might have simply conducted a routine stop of one of the men, who either surrendered or ran. It was also possible there was a denouncer in the local community who preferred not to be deified on TV.

Why did Kulikov and Dasenko do it? The new, of course, said nothing about their motivations. It was simply something subhumans did, no

explanation necessary. Jansky decided to fill in the holes with his own imagined account. Based on nothing more than looks, he decided Kulikov was the “leader.” Kulikov was a man who had been disrespected by everyone, all his life. The teachers and children in school, his parents, his siblings, his landlord, his roommates, his American boss, and many of the Americans he served. He sometimes snarled at them but more often just seethed in silence, knowing the consequences of rudeness. He fantasized about running for years, along with taking a kitchen knife and going on a rampage. The Americans spoke German to him but English to one another, and slowly he picked up the language. He heard their conversations and formed a picture of their life. It was an overly rosy picture. When John told Brad how much he got laid during his trip to England, which Brad took as bluster, Kulikov took it literally. Even when Americans whined, Kulikov thought, “those are problems I’d like to have!” He knew if he ran, his family would be punished and his ghetto would be fined. But why should he care? His “fellow Russians” had spent his entire life stepping on them. They had no claim to his loyalty.

One of Kulikov’s co-workers was Viktor Dasenko. Dasenko, like Kulikov, had always felt disrespected and stepped on. But this didn’t induce hatred but depression. He suffered from learned helplessness, passively accepting that his fate would be to watch others enjoy what he never could. This was until he met Kilokov, who told him it didn’t need to be this way. As he never pushed back against anyone else, he never pushed back against Kulikov, never subjected his promises to scrutiny. Kulikov and Dosenko spent many hours speaking to one other in English, learning to speak without a hint of an accent. Others thought it was a quirky but harmless hobby. For weeks before they fled, they brought small articles of clothing out of the ghetto and stole food from the restaurant, burying it in bags beneath a shrub and hoping the rats didn’t dig it up. They retrieved their things on the day they fled and caught a freight car heading west.

By the time the Kripo realized they were gone, they were already in the Reich. A day later, they had crossed the French border. They approached Calais to hop a train through the Chunnel but were deterred by the number of policemen. Instead, they headed farther west, where they met a Frenchman with a boat. A man named Charles who was still enamored with the ideal of France as the beacon of freedom and light standing up to the darkness emanating from Germany. Marianne, the tricolour, and even Philippe Pétain, a hero from when France allied with Britain, America, and Russia against Germany. Charles did not believe their story that they were American tourists who had run out of money and needed to get to England. But he pretended to and gave them their ride.

Oldham was not what was promised. Kulikov and Dasenko soon found their place at the bottom of its already poor society, doing odd jobs in return for food and lodging. Everyone assumed they were petty crooks on the run for *something*, but so were so many others in that depressed city. Nobody

reported them to the authorities. While they didn't enjoy the material bounty Kulikov had promised them, they did enjoy bountiful leisure time. Dasenko was angry and disappointed but soon accepted his life with fatalism and learned helplessness. Kulikov still seethed, but all he did was commit a few opportunistic burglaries. One day the police stopped him on the street. The jig was up.

Kulikov and Dasenko were hanged in a public square in Manchester the day after the Kripo raid.

Chapter 17

Vladimir Averin mixed the lime into vodka and looked frustrated that the two liquids were not mixing to his satisfaction. Jansky thought it probable that Averin would fall asleep that night with the question "why doesn't Yuri Maslak have a blender in his office" on his mind. It was 3:22 PM on Tuesday, May 21, 2097. The markets were up, the weather was cold, and the people were still a bit spooked after the Kripo raid, but, Jansky hoped, unaware of the constitutional crisis.

Averin, Jansky, and Koloda Sorokin were all in Yuri Maslak's private office space. Sorokin wore a suit and blue tie, Jansky a suit and red tie, while Averin was at least wearing a green dress shirt and light blue jeans. Perhaps Averin considered himself "dressed up." Perhaps he was intentionally sending the signal that he took the constitutional crisis only somewhat seriously. Toma Jansky sat on the couch across from Averin and looked at him with a concerned but compromising look. Standing to Jansky's left and facing Averin was Sorokin, who was *mad*.

"So let me get this straight," Sorokin said. "You think Linov is lying. Don't believe this cockamamie story about how he has cancer and will soon resign. Yet you want to just *sit there* and get drunk."

If not for the worker-bees outside, Sorokin would surely be yelling, Jansky thought. He would have preferred a more measured approach to persuade Averin, in tune with the advice of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. But he realized that advice only went so far. There were a lot of people out there who thought that if a man wasn't yelling, he wasn't serious.

Averin held his right hand up to Sorokin in a "stop" motion. "I tire of you," he said. He looked to Jansky. "So what do you think of my idea? A slapstick comedy of us in the ghetto. The Nazis could use it to expose the 'true nature of subhumanity,'" he said as he made quote marks with his hands. "Incompetence, violence, drunkenness," he said, taking a sip from his glass. "Tomorrow at the pillar council meeting, we'll all be hungover."

Jansky silently noted that of those in the room, only one was using the crisis as an opportunity to get drunk. Averin might think the semi-friendly Jansky and the hostile Sorokin were playing "good cop, bad cop." In a way,

they were, though they hadn't conspired to do so. There were many problems with Averin's suggestion. Alcohol as fodder for slapstick comedy had been banned by the Nazis and could only be found in old films which had been grandfathered in. And the Nazis wanted people to fear the subhumans; fear of the unknown is easier than fear of the familiar. This was why the ghettos would always be black boxes. But Jansky didn't feel like legitimizing Averin's attempts to change the subject. "What I think," Jansky said in a calm voice, "is that you aren't treating me with much respect."

"I have to make a decision," Averin said in a mockingly intense tone.

"Yes," Jansky said plainly.

Averin put down his glass, leaned toward Jansky, and put his finger in the air. "No, I don't," Averin said. "That's the thing with you guys. You think you can push people around by telling them they *need* to do this and they *need* to do that, because you have no power to do things yourself. I know you guys think I'm stupid, but I'm not as stupid as you think. I..."

Sorokin interrupted him. "If you want people to take you seriously, stop acting like a clown!"

"Shut up," Averin said in a firm voice, pointing to Sorokin.

"Look," Jansky said, "all we're asking you to do is sign on to a pillar council resolution recommending that Linov resign for reasons of ill-health. If he doesn't accept it, the council deposes him. We're not asking you to sign on to any particular candidate for succession."

Averin stared at Jansky with an intense look. "If Linov dies, he dies. If he resigns, he resigns. I ain't signing on to any resolution. That's my decision, and I'm sticking to it."

"What do you want?" Sorokin asked. "Money? Title? Woman?"

Averin smirked and picked up his glass, holding it up to Sorokin. "I'd like a blender."

"I think you like having people at your feet begging for your help," Sorokin said. "You're too dumb to have a special skill people need, so you enjoy wasting people's time with this...."

"You feel I'm wasting your time, that's your problem. I've told you I ain't changing my mind already."

"The door's right there," Sorokin said, pointing to it.

Averin drank a large sip of his vodka-lime mixture and then put the glass down, leaving about 50 milliliters remaining. He then stood up, smiled at the two, and walked out.

Jansky turned to Sorokin. "What should we do now?"

"I don't know," Sorokin said. "He's the only one who answered your call. Nobody's answering mine."

"I hope the people don't know," Jansky said.

"They'll find out eventually," Sorokin said in a quiet and frustrated tone. "So this is how the novel climaxes. Nothing clever about the market, engineering, or physics. No speech about political idealism or human nature."

Just a dumb*** who was born into wealth and doesn't feel like making any hard decisions.”

“The people we called know where to find us,” Jansky said. “I guess we should remain here.”

Sorokin nodded.

“Hopefully, Maslak has more luck,” Jansky said.

For about an hour, Jansky and Sorokin surfed the net on their laptops, reading and discussing the news. Maslak told them to tell nobody except the council members and their close advisors about Linov's supposed illness. They had learned that mourning and spent the day frantically trying to contact the councilmen. Jansky thought the illness, if a clever plan by Linov, would likely backfire. It seemed far too convenient. Even in the midwits on the council would see through it. Brain cancer, almost certainly fatal but not causing any immediate symptoms. Allowing him to walk around and stage-manage his succession. Why didn't he just wait until he turned sixty-five?

The Nazis told a tale about Stalin's reaction to the 1941 invasion. Supposedly Stalin withdrew to a cabin and spent a week making shoes, refusing to see his generals or discuss the military situation. This may have been a ruse, they say, as the ambitious men who tried to take control were arrested once he regained sanity. The story had some parallels to the situation with Linov and Jansky might be able to exploit them. But the big difference was that Stalin's flunkies proclaimed their unconditional loyalty to him. The “swing voters” on the council did not. Linov already knew how loyal they were. He wasn't going to learn anything from the escapade.

If there was a “logical” reason for why Linov did what he did, it was that he hoped to create a climate of fear and chaos that would induce the council to cling to tradition. Perhaps he figured that the situation with the productivization mandate would soon “normalize” and that the attitude of uncertainty and fear should be exploited while it lasted. More likely, though, was that Linov was propelled by fear and impatience. He had always told people his son needed to succeed him or else there would be chaos, and so many people repeated it back to him that he started to believe it himself.

At 4:41, Jansky received a call. The caller ID bore the name of Evan DeWine, regional director of CableCo and a big man on the KBA. Jansky had met him a few times. He looked and sounded like the stereotypical American corporate man – middle-aged, mildly handsome, short brown hair, black suit, gray tie, and so on. “Hello,” came the voice from the phone. “Is this Toma Jansky?”

“Yes.”

“Hi, this is Evan DeWine. I won't beat around the bush here. What's going on in the ghetto?”

“The situation is under control,” Jansky said calmly.

“I've heard that before.”

“Where?”

"From my men earlier in the year. There was some nonsense about solar flares in geosynchronous orbits or something like that. They told me, 'the situation is under control, the situation is under control.' The situation *wasn't* under control. We lost millions."

"Look, we're doing everything we can here. That's all I can say."

"Are they gonna close the ghetto?"

Jansky did not respond for some seconds. "That will be for the Kripo to decide, if it comes to that. If you want to avoid that, the most important thing is to...." Jansky paused, considering his words. "Say nothing" could sound incriminating. "You need to avoid spreading any baseless rumors. Make sure all your colleagues know not to spread any baseless rumors."

"Well, what's the problem anyway?"

Jansky again delayed his response. He was trying to seem deferential. He couldn't and wouldn't "squeal" but would at least act like he was giving some thought to doing so. "It is better that information is not shared at this time."

After a pause on the line, DeWine spoke. "I understand," he said in a voice that sounded genuinely understanding. "Thank you for your time."

"You are welcome," Jansky said.

The line clicked, ending the call. Jansky put down his phone.

Sorokin, who had been close enough to hear the conversation, looked to him. "Do you think the guy would have accepted an explanation had you decided to give one?"

"Perhaps," Jansky said. "People don't like being ignorant. When someone offers them some insight into a black box, they want to cling to it. And then there's the fact that a man who does nothing in a crisis will be judged more harshly than a man who does something, even if that something made the situation worse. He wants to tell his boss he did something. Perhaps I could have provided it."

"You could have said to lobby the ghetto to reject Taras Linov," Sorokin said

Jansky had already decided he would not do so but didn't want to say this out loud. "It won't need to come to that," he said.

Sorokin smiled and nodded silently.

At 7 p.m., Maslak called Sorokin and told them to meet him in his penthouse. They got their things and prepared to leave. They then walked out into the sea of worker bees. To Jansky's relief, none batted an eye, indicating they did not know anything was up. On reaching the Yamel Tower lobby, the scene looked entirely normal. Nobody was queueing up to see them. No police had been massed, just one man eating a piece of bread. The walk was leisurely, normal. It was cold by the standards of May, but the sun was out, and it was not windy. They arrived at the lobby of Shapoval 150 and met the young, Central Asian looking man at the front, who took their thumbprints and then let them in. Jansky had finally remembered his name, Pavel Letov. He did not seem unusually concerned or attentive.

They took the elevator up to the penthouse and were met, unusually, by four of Maslak's servants, including the head honcho, Yuri Pokrovsky. One young man, a young woman, and a middle-aged woman were sitting around the front room and not doing any work. The two women had clear looks of concern, while the young man looked bored and unhappy to be there. They were, in a way, human shields. They couldn't stop an ax-wielding assassin, but they might slow him down. But Jansky decided not to dwell on that. It reminded him of the supposed evidence of the "Anglo-American first strike" that justified the Nazis' "pre-emptive" nuclear strike. There were a lot of lights on at the pentagon in the days leading up to it.

"Maslak is in his office," Pokrovsky said. He seemed neither concerned nor annoyed.

Sorokin and Jansky thanked Pokrovsky and went to the office. There, sitting in his chair, was Yuri Maslak. Ivan Vinov and Alya Semko were sitting on the couch. Sorokin and Jansky would remain standing. Semko seemed concerned, Vinov less so, and Maslak had the same I-am-in-control facial expression as always.

"So, where are we?" Sorokin asked.

"Yumatov's basically on board," Maslak said. "The others are not. 'Wait and see,' they all say. Of them, only Savel may actually have a plan here. The rest are just sitting on their hands."

"Have you been able to reach everyone?" Jansky asked.

Maslak turned to him. "Normal people sometimes turn off their phones so they can visit grandma without disturbance. Council members are not like that. One of the few official requirements is that we can never turn off our phones. The President and Chief of the Ghetto Police can always reach us. Everyone knows what is happening. Those who haven't answered my calls chose not to do so."

"Who did you talk to?" Jansky asked.

Maslak contemplated for a few seconds. "Yumatov, Savel, Protsenko, Averin, Shvets, Yakovich, and Belsky."

Maslak plus seven more, Jansky thought. They could do it with all members but one. "Not Yana Kobzar?"

"No."

"So what should we do?" asked Sorokin.

"The three of us are agreed on what must be done. Select personalities on the KBA will be told that violence has broken out in the ghetto. We won't say so explicitly, but we'll strongly imply it. We will go down there tomorrow morning and tell them in person. They will be asked not to go to the Kripo, for now anyway. Naturally, they will try and reach out to the councilmen, looking for the other side of the story. God willing, this will frighten the councilmen into action."

Jansky and Sorokin said nothing for several seconds. "What do you mean, 'God willing?' You're an atheist," Jansky said.

Maslak looked annoyed. "It's just an expression."

"What happens if the councilmen aren't frightened into action?"

"The rumors reach the Kripo. They look into this disease thing. Maybe have a Nazi doctor examine Linov. They don't like being lied to."

"What if they launch a raid?"

"The blood will be on Linov's hands."

"No," Jansky said, "it will be on your hands. Because you want us to lie."

"Did Linov not threaten you? Did he not threaten your family?"

"Threats of violence some time ago are not the same as acts of violence," Jansky said. "What happens if the Kripo looks into you? The truth of your claims?"

"That's why we won't say things explicitly."

"You're putting our lives and the lives of everyone in the ghetto at risk."

"We are already staring into death, Toma," said Maslak.

"You propose to put fuel into the fire," Jansky said. "I have a different proposal. We sit on our hands. Call Linov's bluff. He will eventually resign."

"If we haven't done anything by then, we will appear weak. We have no other choice."

From their facial expressions, Jansky thought Vinov and Semko agreed with Maslak. He turned to Sorokin. "You buy this," he said, pointing to Maslak.

"I am afraid I agree with Maslak," he said. He looked a bit guilty when he said it, but his voice was sincere.

"Why?"

"We don't have a choice," Sorokin said.

"Well, I do have a choice," Jansky said. "I will play no part in this idiocy."

Alya Semko had previously looked unperturbed but now looked enraged. Vinov wore a poker face, and Sorokin switched to staring at Jansky with a stern, almost thuggish look. Maslak looked in control, as ever. "You are going down a dangerous path, Toma," Maslak said. His voice was not angry but like that of a teacher lecturing a failing student.

Jansky did not respond, and for a few seconds, there was silence in the room.

"Toma," Vinov said calmly. "I think your concern is misplaced."

"Why? Is this not pouring fuel onto a fire?"

"Revolutions are not made by people determined to remain in air-conditioned comfort and safety," Vinov said.

"Well, if this is revolution, I prefer the armchair."

"This is not a joking matter, Toma," Maslak said.

"I am not joking."

"Are you going to go over to Linov?" Maslak asked.

"No."

"Then what?"

“Compromise candidate.”

“Who?”

“I’ll tell you later,” Jansky said.

For about five seconds, nobody said anything. “The door is right there,” Maslak said calmly. “Don’t let us take time away from the execution of your brilliant plan.” Beneath the sarcastic voice was real anger.

Jansky said nothing for about ten seconds. He then looked around the room. “Is there something I’m missing here?” Jansky asked. “Some skeletons that absolutely must stay buried?” It was not an entirely rhetorical question. There were still things Jansky didn’t know. Who gave the diaries to Maslak, and where were they kept beforehand?

For some seconds, nobody said anything, then Maslak spoke. “Nothing I feel like sharing with you,” he said in a rude tone.

“Alright then,” Jansky said, turning to leave.

“Toma,” Semko snarled. “You walk out that door, you can consider your employment terminated.”

Jansky turned around. “I have the contact information of all of our clients. I have a perspective I can share with them,” he said threateningly.

Semko smiled. “Do whatever you want. I trust our clients can smell a disgruntled employee from five miles away.”

“I’m not sure the firing of Toma Jansky is required,” Maslak interjected. “Maybe just a dock in pay, after he realizes that the doors of the wider world are firmly closed to someone like him.”

Semko looked shocked at Maslak’s interjection but regained her composure. “In consideration of my friend Yuri, I will think about that,” she said.

Maslak turned to Jansky. “Goodbye,” he said, waving.

Jansky turned around but was again stopped from leaving by a last-minute appeal. This time it was Ivan Vinov. “Wait, wait,” Vinov said.

Jansky turned around and faced his former friend.

“This isn’t you, Toma,” said Vinov. “You’re acting as a character in someone else’s novel. Yuri is right. It’s a cold, dark world out there, and you will find nobody listens to you, nobody wants to invite you to the party. Even if you get your compromise candidate, whoever it is will ignore you the moment he takes office.”

Maslak didn’t look pleased that Vinov was considering the possibility of Jansky’s plan succeeding. But he likely realized it wasn’t the time to make more enemies. Jansky looked at Vinov. “Maybe I care about people other than myself. The innocent Russians who are gonna get butchered if this insane plan goes through.”

“Deep down, you know that’s not your true motivation,” Vinov said.

“Have a nice time, Ivan,” he said, turning and finally walking out the door. He made it through the penthouse without incident and then walked down the stairs, not feeling like waiting for the elevator. As soon as he made

it into the street, he called Nora.

“How are you?” He asked.

“Same as always, home with the kids,” she said. “How are things with you?”

“Not good,” he said. “Will be there in a sec.”

“Alright,” she said, seemingly unphased. She understood he couldn’t explain it over the phone.

Ten minutes later, he arrived to find his smiling wife holding their crying baby. “So what’s the issue?” she asked.

Jansky took off his business suit and then stretched his arms while formulating what he would say. “Linov supposedly has cancer. Maslak wants us to go to the KBA and have them call up the councilmen with the implied threat to intercede with the Kripo to prevent the younger Linov’s election. I refused to participate. I now want to find a compromise candidate to succeed to the Presidency, other than Maslak or Linov.” He was surprised it took so few words to explain.

Nora didn’t look concerned, which gave her husband the creeps. “So what are you going to do?”

“Well, first, I need to talk to Yumatov,” he said. “You don’t look concerned?”

“You’re not the only one who can hide it.”

Jansky was disappointed in the response but did not say so. He leaned forward, kissed his wife on the forehead, and then sat on the couch. After a second, he left and went into his room to escape the crying baby. He then dialed for Yumatov. Ten minutes later, he was at the man’s door, having put the suit and tie back on. Alik Yumatov sported a white and gray dress shirt. “Come on in,” Yumatov said.

Jansky had never been invited to Yumatov’s home, though he had never before reflected on why. He was still a fundamentally non-social person and had always treated “the game” as another chore. The inside of Yumatov’s penthouse reflected the “modern” elite style. The front room walls were painted white, with black couches and cabinets, two gray armchairs that faced a blue-glass coffee table, a gray and white rug, and a light gray cabinet seemingly built into the wall. The kitchen across from it had wood vinyl flooring and stainless steel cabinets so spotless they were almost mirrors. To Jansky’s left was the dining room, with a clear glass table and white chairs.

“We can sit and talk there,” Yumatov said, pointing to the armchairs. “Would you like anything? I have soda, wine, and tea.”

Jansky would have normally said no, but thought it important to signal his closeness. “Yes, some wine, a small glass though; I’m not much of a drinker.”

Yumatov looked surprised. “Alright then,” he said. He went over to the cabinet and opened it, revealing a series of glasses of varying sizes and shapes, all carefully sorted and arranged. There was no porcelain, and Jansky assumed there was a separate cabinet for it. He smiled slightly as he compared

it to his own apartment, where cups bearing corporate logos were shoved together in no particular pattern. Yumatov then went into the kitchen and returned with a bottle of SDAR wine, pouring a small glass for Jansky and a larger glass for himself. He brought the glasses to the table and both took sips. Jansky tried to hide his disgust with the stuff, as he much preferred beer or vodka. Looking at Yumatov's glass, Jansky estimated it contained the equivalent of three shots of vodka.

"So are your wife and kids here," Jansky said.

Yumatov, after a long sip, answered. "Nobody is going to come into this room. You can speak as freely as you want."

Jansky was thankful for the brevity and so told his story. He left a lot out, saying nothing about the bunker, the diaries, and *Prison of the Nation*. He recounted that Linov had threatened him, that he reluctantly went with Maslak, and why he was now turning against Maslak. He tried not to dally in part because Yumatov, who never interrupted him, was drinking increasingly large sips of wine. He looked neither happy nor sad as he did so. It was as if this was his normal evening routine, and perhaps it was. Or perhaps he was good at looking unemotional when he was really terrified. Jansky hoped it wasn't so.

After Jansky finished speaking, he looked to Yumatov, who had finished his glass and looked like he might want more. "What do you think?" Jansky asked

"You know these finance guys better than I do," Yumatov said. "What do they think of this?"

Jansky was surprised by the response. "The American finance guys?"

Yumatov nodded.

"Well," he said uneasily, "they are naturally unhappy. They want stability. They want their workers to show up on time. They want to never have to hear about what goes on in this ghetto."

"And?" he asked.

Jansky realized that Yumatov was expecting some kind of "pitch" and was impatient for him to make it.

"The American finance people want the situation resolved. That can best be accomplished by voting Linov out and electing his successor in a single day. I understand the temptation to say 'f*** those people,' but without the tech and financial industry, Kyiv would be another Kharkiv or Donbas."

Yumatov looked at him with a serious and accusatory look. "It's a common strategy among con-men to create a perception of urgency. Act, don't think. Do it, don't dwell on it."

"Time really is of the essence here," Jansky said. "This process will not be easier when we have the people, the Americans, and the Kripo breathing down our necks."

"Move quickly," Yumatov said theatrically. "You certainly moved quickly in going against your old patron Maslak. Are you sure you're not

acting rashly, Toma?"

Despite the tone, Jansky thought Yumatov was only going through the motions of skepticism to be able to tell himself later that he did so. He'd want to tell others, and himself, that this was *his* idea, and that would be easier if he asked some skeptical questions. "I've thought long and hard about red lines. That if Maslak crosses them, I will oppose him. He has crossed them."

"Fine," Yumatov said. "If time is of the essence, let's get right down to it. Linov wants us to elect his son. Maslak, himself. Who do you want?"

"Well, would you want the office?"

"I have no desire to sit on the throne," Yumatov said.

Jansky considered asking if he would do it for "duty." He decided against it.

"Then how about a foreign prince?"

Yumatov raised his eyebrow. "You aren't going to suggest yourself?"

"No. I don't expect they would elect me."

"But if elected, you would serve?"

"Yes."

"Well, you are right. They will never elect you," Yumatov said. He didn't look like he had much confidence in the assertion. "So a foreign prince it is," Yumatov said.

Jansky nodded.

"Got any ideas?"

Jansky was surprised at the response. Yumatov ought to at least pretend that he is this well-traveled, cultured prince with many ties to other noble houses.

"North Berlin."

"Let me think about that for a second," Yumatov said. For about five minutes, the two sat in silence, with Yumatov looking up and down and side to side. Sometimes he stared at his glass as if contemplating another drink. Jansky resisted the urge to interject something, knowing that Yumatov was trying to find a flaw in his logic, something that didn't quite add up in his story. If Jansky looked like he was trying to interrupt him, that might be considered incriminating. Finally, Yumatov spoke. "I suppose we should act without delay in making contact with Berlin," he said.

"Yes," Jansky said. "Though we might want to consider deposing Linov first. That way, we can do it with Maslak's support."

"No," Yumatov said. "The other councilmen won't vote for a jump into the unknown. We need someone of flesh and blood, tangible."

Jansky understood the reasoning and did not argue with it. "Alright," he said. "Do you have the contact information of the North Berlin pillar?"

"Yes," Yumatov said.

Jansky was relieved.

Over the next fifteen minutes, Yumatov got on the phone, or seemed to be getting on the phone, with the North Berlin Easterner Ghetto's pillar. "Yes,"

“no,” “sir,” “it’s complex,” “we are discussing it,” and so on. After he put down the phone, Yumatov looked at Jansky. “I couldn’t get through to Telev,” he said, referring to the ghetto’s President. “But we are apparently welcome to send a delegation to their ghetto.”

“When do we leave?”

“I want to talk with the other council members tomorrow. Hopefully, we can get them to join us.”

“Good,” Jansky said. “Supposing we can’t, who else goes?”

“Myself and you,” Yumatov said, seeming surprised at the question.

“A delegation of two people?”

“Who else would we bring?”

“You have employees, advisors, friends,” Jansky said, uneasily.

“I’m not going to ask them to be part of this. It is my cross to bear.”

“You could at least give them the option?”

“No,” Yumatov said forcefully.

“Your wife?”

“Out of the question. She is needed here.”

“A delegation of two people doesn’t look very good.”

“Well, you bring someone,” Yumatov said, sounding annoyed.

“I suppose I could bring my wife.”

“Why?”

“If people ask why she’s there, I’ll say it’s to provide me with emotional support. If people want to read into it that she is a power player in her own right, I can’t stop them from doing so.”

“She’s not from any prominent family, I take it?” Yumatov asked.

“Her parents oversee proles working in Leningrad cloth factory.”

Yumatov looked confused.

Jansky tried hard to hide his frustration at Yumatov’s ignorance. Aristocrats are supposed to at least know history. “Leningrad,” he said. “It’s the Russian name for Adolfsberg. Anyway, my wife can speak passably about the stock market. They might think there’s more there than meets the eye.”

“You may bring her if you wish, then,” Yumatov said.

“Alright,” Jansky said. “Another thing,” he said. “When we go to Berlin, do we request an old man, a young man, a childless man, a man with children? Are we looking for another dynasty, or will the council exercise its own free choice as to a successor?”

Yumatov shrugged, looking annoyed. After a few seconds, he said, “I’ll ask the other council members what they want.”

Jansky nodded his approval.

“If there is nothing else, I have some personal matters to attend to,” Yumatov said.

The words gave Jansky the creeps, wondering if it meant talking to Linov or Maslak. But he realized it likely meant the man was tired and would like to lay down. Or perhaps drink more alcohol. “Alright,” Jansky said. “I’ll talk to

you tomorrow."

Chapter 18

The Kemerovo city and concentration camp complex was known internationally as both a hell on earth and a place where fortunes are made. About 200 miles from Novosibirsk in Siberia, the majority of its population were subhuman prisoners of African descent, found guilty of robbery and other crimes not punishable by immediate execution. The able-bodied mine coal. Those who can't are shot and cremated, ashes adding to the region's massive pollution. The SS openly proclaims that those among them with "disciplinary records" and "difficult personalities" are sent there to "redeem" themselves. Yet there are many who choose to live there, English and Chinese and Indians and Russians. Coal mining is a complex process and cannot work entirely off of slave labor. Those who live in the city and ghetto typically live there for not more than five years, building up savings to return to their homes and start families. To compensate for the dreary, polluted, middle-of-nowhere environment, wages are high.

Kemerovo is also home to the biggest of the Reich's data storage centers. Supposedly every phone call, text message, and email is stored there. Jansky had no doubt the Nazis wanted to do this but wasn't sure if they had paid the money in bandwidth and computing to actually do so. If they did, Kemerovo was an appropriate location due to its cheap coal-produced electricity, plentiful water, and cool climate, not to mention the morbid thoughts it induced in those who dwelt on the subject.

The crisis was on its second day that Wednesday mourning, and many Americans had called Jansky, asking what was going on. His response was quite simple. Yes, there is a power struggle. No, there is no violence and no, you should not tell anyone else about it. He could have simply refused to answer, keeping his voice out of that hypothetical Siberian archive. But that could not do. He was already entangled and had to see the situation through to the end.

It was slightly after nine, and Jansky was sitting on the couch at home, drinking his mourning cup of imitation coffee. Nora and the children were all there, sick, they said. "It is not a school day" was enough to quiet the children. Jansky wore shorts and a t-shirt as he waited for calls. Yumatov was organizing the expedition. They would leave tomorrow, he had said. In the meantime, Jansky unmuted the television and listened to the story about development in Indian East Kyiv. He thought about what the news would look like if there were a free, or at least freer, press. The journalists would no doubt have been told about the succession crisis. Their audience of North Kyiv Indians and Americans would be at least a little interested in the details of the massive black boxes at the center of their city. There would be talking heads from the Institute For the Study of the Subhuman Question, brought in to

opine on what is likely to happen, how “the market” will react, and so on. Within the ghetto, Maslak and Linov would have their partisans and media people blaring out their narratives. There might be grifters looking to make a buck with baseless speculations and ridiculous conspiracy theories. The bystander would not be able to tell truth from falsehood. But he would know that if someone wanted him to know something, the means to get it out there existed on the internet.

It was, of course, fantastical, as the Nazis would never allow such unfettered media to exist. The tyrants of the early industrial period had been surprisingly indolent, feeling threatened by militias and military men but not by the scrawny man with a sheet of paper. But those days were long gone.

At 10:38, while watching TV with Nora, he got a call from Dylan Foster.

“Hello,” Jansky said.

“Hi,” Foster said. “I heard there’s some fightin’ in the ghetto,” he said in an informal, nothing-really-matters voice.

“Fighting with words, not with fists, yes.”

“Well, that’s too bad,” he said. “Is there an arbitrage opportunity in this?”

Jansky was unsurprised by the question. “I’ve been thinking about this all mourning. I can’t think of anything.”

“Yeah, me neither,” Foster said

“Have any of our investors asked about it?”

“No,” Foster said.

Jansky got the sense that the Americans who knew were those young and ambitious men who spent a lot of time on Vanbar street and were immersed in its environment, who used tech and finance jargon on a daily basis. Dador’s investors tended to be older people oriented toward the golf course and the country club, wanting to make money from Vanbar Street but not spending much time there.

“You planning on telling them?”

There was a pause in the line. “No immediate plans. I will keep you posted. Do you have anything else you’d like to talk about?”

“No,” Jansky said.

“Alright, I’ll let you go back to work.”

The phone clicked and Nora walked over to him. “Foster?” she asked.

He nodded.

“He know about the ‘break?’”

“Doesn’t sound like it.”

“You think you’ll wind up canned from the company?”

“Very likely.”

“Then why hasn’t it happened?”

“If it happened now, I’d have something to point to and say, look how corrupt Maslak is, what a tyrant, etc. If he waits one week until this resolves, he can take his revenge without worrying about that.”

“Or he still thinks you’ll come crawling back.”

"Well, I won't," he said. He pulled his wife closer and whispered in her ear. "When I go to Berlin, it will be made clear that I will expect a reward from the new king, some job in the pillar."

She smiled. "Any specific position in mind?"

"No. I'll give him leeway. It's the pay I really care about."

"I had a thought about the question of who the man will be," Nora said. "Will North Berlin take this as an opportunity to dump some incompetent on us? Perhaps. But it's just as likely they'll send someone super-competent who makes the rest of the old princes look bad. Who should we wish for?"

"Well," he said, "someone incompetent is not necessarily easy to push around. So, for our sakes and the sake of everyone, we should hope for someone smart."

"You know the Nazis say Stalin was an Okhrana agent," Nora said. "That the Jewish puppet masters knew this, had proof of this, and lifted him up specifically as a man who could never cut his puppet strings. Ridiculous the lot of it. But you could imagine us doing the same thing. Find someone horribly compromised who can be controlled via blackmail."

"Unfortunately, we don't know any North Berlin aristocrats like that."

She nodded and they started watching TV again.

Throughout the day, he got more calls from Americans but none from anyone inside the ghetto. This was a good sign. The people still were not aware. There were probably people out there spreading rumors, but most who heard them would ignore them.

At 3:13 p.m., Yumatov called him and informed him that no other council member had officially signed up to the proposal. But some (Yumatov wouldn't say which) were vaguely warm to it and had encouraged him and Jansky to go. They bought their train tickets, and Jansky called his mother, Masha Jansky. She was not thrilled by the sudden need for babysitting and was even less thrilled by his refusal to say anything more than 'we are going to Berlin.' He loved his mother but did not trust her to keep the situation secret. Ultimately she accepted the children, a hug, and a five-hundred Weltmark gift. She arrived that night to pick up the children. She didn't seem to suspect anything was remiss.

Toma and Nora Jansky arrived at the Sugenlar at 5:12 AM the next morning, Toma carrying a suitcase with enough clothing for three days. He wore a plain black t-shirt, while Nora wore a purple t-shirt. There was no need to dress up for the train ride. They then walked up the concrete steps to the second-floor "luggage section." Whether they had luggage or not, everyone who traveled outside the *Gau* had to go through the section. The waiting area's walls, floor, and ceiling were made of concrete and the checkpoint was protected by a steel gate that would open at 6 AM. They found Alik Yumatov alone there, dressed in business casual and drinking something from a thermos, a suitcase beside him. Nora Jansky introduced herself to Yumatov, with both looking too tired for a long conversation.

After a while, they sat down on the concrete floor, and Toma Jansky attempted to read a book. He decided he didn't have the energy for it, so instead listened to music. More and more people arrived and got in line behind them. 6 AM came and went, the gray steel of the gate unchanged. Perhaps a piece of machinery had broken down. Perhaps a needed worker was sick. More likely, the soldiers who manned the line decided to play a few games of ping-pong before starting their boring, dreary job. The "main" lines had to run smoothly because firms would complain if their workers were late. There was no firm there to complain if people who wanted to visit relatives in Moscow saw their trips delayed. But Jansky wasn't that worried. He had factored such delays into his planning.

When the gate opened, the group walked forward onto the so-called "plaza," with Alik Yumatov in the lead. The plaza had three "terminals," each with a fingerprint scanner, iris scanner, document scanner, and ELD scanner, identical to the standard checkpoints below. Each also had a luggage scanning machine and a hexagonal box about eight feet tall that functioned as a body scanner. To the left of the three "terminals" was a glass box that contained three men typing on computers, where the officer class could lounge around and pretend to oversee the scene. To the right, painted on the concrete wall, was Himmler, with a quote about the need to be "ruthless in protecting Germany from the subhuman threat."

Though there were three terminals and Jansky, Yumatov, and Nora were in the front of the line, "parties" who traveled together were required to go through the terminals together, so Yumatov led the way to the central terminal. Yumatov put his bag onto the luggage scanning machine to his right, then emptied his pockets into a light gray tray. A few seconds later, the conveyor belt activated and pushed the bag and tray into the machine. He then turned to his left, where a Turkish soldier was sitting. He put his thumb into the fingerprint scanner, his I.D. into the I.D. scanner, and his ELD into the ELD scanner, then bent over and looked into the eye scanner. He then handed his "pass" to the soldier, who glanced at it briefly and put it under the photocopier.

"Where are you going," the soldier said, speaking accented German. He was dark-skinned, with curly black hair and a broad face. He looked like he was in his late twenties, though he was probably younger.

"The North Berlin Easterner Ghetto," Yumatov replied. His voice was eerily normal though it made sense. Yumatov, as a pillar councilman, had faced many Kripo men far more powerful than this soldier.

"Why are you going there?"

"To have a conversation with the leadership of the North Berlin Easterner Ghetto about talent acquisition strategies."

"What is the nature of these talent acquisition strategies?"

"The conversation will concern the advantages and disadvantages of recruiting people from other ghettos who have extensive experience in pillar

governance.”

The soldier looked plain, emotionless. No doubt it was a ritual he had gone through many times before. He asked the question and got an answer full of business and technology buzzwords he did not understand. He asked the standard ‘what is the nature of’ question knowing he would also not understand the answer. On occasion his superiors told him to detain a specific person. Other times he was told to detain someone at random. Other times he had a vague sense something was off, so detained the person on his own initiative. Had the soldier looked at Yumatov’s pass carefully, he would have seen it said explicitly that they were to recruit a candidate to succeed Linov as President, put there as it was a major felony to lie about one’s reason for leaving the ghetto. Had he seen it, the soldier might have found it unbelievable and ordered the group detained. But he didn’t and waved Yumatov through. Yumatov walked into the man-scanning machine, put his arms up, and stood patiently for the five seconds before the green ‘all clear’ light flashed. He walked to the other end of the luggage-scanning machine, got his stuff, and walked away.

Toma Jansky went next, followed by Nora, and both times the soldier had no questions. They met Yumatov and then exited into the bus station opposite the Sugenlar. If the gamble worked and Jansky told the story to his grandchildren, he thought he’d leave out certain uninteresting details, like how the whole plan could have been torpedoed if a twenty-year-old Turkish man had done his job more thoroughly. The three boarded a bus that headed to Pasazhyrskyi Train Station. The bus ride was smooth and uneventful, and they arrived with an hour to spare.

There were three stations in Pasazhyrskyi. The central station was built in the 1920s in the style of Ukrainian Baroque and was one of the few Soviet-era structures left standing. The southern and northern stations were built in Nazified neoclassical style. All the stations were topped by massive Nazi flags. There were always a lot of soldiers and policemen around the rail stations, and this time was no exception. There were American policemen in blue, German Kripo men in black, and regular soldiers from some dark-skinned country in green. But they were substantially outnumbered by ordinary Americans, and the mood overall seemed to be a happy one. Dylan Foster told him that only young, lower-class American men are unnerved by the sight of police, soldiers, and SS men. Women, older people, and the rich and educated feel comforted and protected by their presence.

The three headed about two blocks to the Northern station. They entered and were met with the yammering voice of some radio pundit going on about rice yields in India. They went to the vending machines and bought food, sandwiches, packaged cheese, and canned tea. After getting their food, the three got onto the last of the third-class train carriages, the one reserved for subhumans. The subhuman car was largely identical to the other third-class cars, with the same green padded seats and the same amount of room. The

Reichsbahn wanted people to ride, of course. But there were four black semi-spherical cameras attached to the ceiling and a set of three chairs at the front of the carriage, facing backward and colored orange. To the left of the chairs was a sign that read: “subhumans who behave suspiciously will be detained. The benefit of the doubt will NOT be given.” The orange chairs were for the “rail police,” men, invariably Reich subjects, who were charged with ensuring that no subhuman got off except at their destination. Most just wanted to sit and read magazines, but a few were zealous in conducting random, impromptu interrogations. The Reichsbahn had been privatized back in the 2050s, and Jansky wondered if there was an ongoing lobbying effort to cool down the interrogations.

The train car was half-full, and they got a group of three seats near the back. Toma offered Yumatov the window seat, but Yumatov declined it, as did Nora. Toma, thus, began staring out the window at 8:23 AM, feeling a small bit of relief. Nora attempted to fall asleep in her husband’s lap and quickly succeeded. It reminded him of school, how he envied those who could sleep in class, something he could not do no matter how bored he was.

He thought about the Americans boarding the cars in front, who would periodically walk into the so-called “prison car” to use the bathroom. They would be working-class in the third-class car and middle-class in the second and first-class cars. The truly affluent flew in airplanes. Some were headed to Warsaw or Litzmannstadt, but the bulk were headed to Berlin. There was a lot for the American tourist to see in Berlin. There were amusement parks, brothels, sporting events, museums, monuments, art galleries, and theaters. One could stand on the balcony of the 144-story Reich Commerce Building and see the Volkshalle and the Reich Chancellery to the south, the city of a hundred million extending as far as the eye can see.

The ancient Catholic and Protestant churches, “priceless pieces of Germanic heritage,” were also preserved and could be toured. If one took the Nazis seriously, all 300 million Germans, every single one, had voluntarily abandoned the Christian religion. The Reich subjects and foreigners were not there yet, but “progress” in abandoning superstition was supposedly swift. Replacing it was the political religion of national socialism. Berlin was its Mecca. There, millions of Americans, Mexicans, Indians, and Japanese journeyed to see the sites and return with the cachet of a *Hajji*. They toured the German military museums and stood in moments of silence for the brave Germanic soldiers who fought to bring peace to the world. They toured the Museum of the Jewish Question and the Museum of the Freemason Question and learned about the horrors those soldiers had fought. They toured the Museum of the Third World War, full of radiation suits and Geiger counters and multimedia presentations about blast ranges and anti-ballistic missile defense. Like Christ’s suffering on the cross, all that suffering and death from radiation sickness, flying glass, and third-degree burns was supposedly necessary to free the world from its initial fallen state. “We must suffer one

last time so that our children and grandchildren and their children and their grandchildren will be forever free from the scourge of war.” Every good national socialist knew Himmler’s quote, just as every good Muslim knew that there was no God but Allah and Muhammed was his Prophet. The experience of the Berlin *Hajj* was humbling, said an American Jansky had overheard, just as he imagined Mecca was to the Muslim.

But the comparison was not absolute. Islam, whether or not it was founded as a universal religion, had evolved into one. National socialism could never be truly universal, for the maintenance of biologically pure races was its most vital tenet. The holiest places in national socialism, the Avenue of Splendors with the Reich Chancellery and the Volkshalle and the Triumphal Arch, were in the portion of Central Berlin restricted to Germans and their servants. The non-German *Hajjis* were relegated to Linthe near the airport, where the party built their “international” propaganda complex.

Berlin was not just a tourist city. It was the global financial center and, more importantly, the world center of lobbying. Every major first-tier firm had to have an office there. The bigwig lobbyists flew into Berlin, but their secretaries would take the train.

Shortly before 9 A.M., the two rail policemen arrived and walked slowly up and down the carriage. They wore green uniforms, and Jansky would have guessed they were Latin American. To Jansky’s relief, they sat at the front of the carriage without interrogating anyone. At 9:05, the train set off. An hour into the train ride, they were out of the “51st state” and in the rural areas of Western Ukraine, full of farms owned by Indian and Pakistani smallholders. Nora Jansky was fast asleep. Alik Yumatov looked tired but couldn’t or did not want to fall asleep and was listening to headphones. Across from them was a couple with two young children. The adults looked tired, but the children were happy and full of energy, eagerly staring out the window at the strange rural landscapes. The train car was eerily silent, quite unlike the busses in the ghetto but much like the Sugenlar. Nobody wanted to mark himself as a target of interrogation. There were, however, a lot of German and English conversations coming from the car in front of them. Jansky had brought a book, *Hand of Ceres*, and read on and off throughout the ride. As they moved further West and got into Germany, the grass grew greener and the trees grew taller. The train stopped in Warsaw. Two Polish men, distinguishable by their “P” badges, got on the train, while nobody in the subhuman car got off. The next stop was Litzmannstadt, where a few Russians exited and were replaced by an elderly Polish man and a black family with five children.

As they approached the city, a noise came from the speaker in the front left of the train car. “You are now entering Reich-Capital Berlin.” The speaker then started playing the Horst-Wessel Song. “Raise the flag! The ranks tightly closed! The SA marches with calm, steady step!” Jansky looked out the window to the fields behind barbed wire. He could see that to the front of the

train was a suburban neighborhood under construction. As they passed into it, the barbed wire which protected the train from cows continued, providing a window into single-family homes under construction. In the distance were larger towers of about six stories, seemingly finished, though perhaps not so on the inside. After a while, Jansky saw a billboard of a smiling Asian family, man, woman, and four children. On the top was a message in Chinese; below it was German. “Are you Chinese? Come to Mengxi – a quiet neighborhood of the Reich Capital. Opening September 2097. Buy in advance and save big!”

The Eugenic Protection Decree of 2066 prevented employers from employing too many people in a given area, forcing them to expand their offices outward rather than upward. Cities sprawled and Berlin, the world’s largest city, had sprawled the most. The city of one hundred and ten million had swallowed most of the German state of Brandenburg. Unlike the cities of the Rhine-Ruhr, which fiercely maintained local identities as they rubbed up against one another, the towns swallowed by Berlin readily recast themselves as ‘neighborhoods’ of the capital. This development showed no signs of stopping. It was sometimes predicted that when the world reaches the theoretical maximum population of 100 billion people, the population will be distributed roughly equally through the globe’s inhabitable portions. That Germans and Chinese and Indians will move to Africa, recreating the features of the Reich, including ghettos for Russians and black Africans. What Jansky thought will actually happen is that Berlin will expand to cover the entirety of the North European Plain.

They passed Mengxi and entered the Arab town of Sebgag. Again was a billboard of the same pattern, a smiling Arab family with three children and a message in both Arabic and German. “Are you Arab? Move to Sebgag, a comfortable town, a comfortable life!” Jansky got out his phone and brought up the Reich Encyclopedia page of Berlin, then began staring into the map. It showed neighborhoods color-coded for who lived there. Those in green were “non-ethnic” for people who were of mixed race, were race-mixers, or were, for other reasons, booted out of the upper-class homogenous neighborhoods. In black were the ghettos. Most of the city was colored a few common colors, red for Germans, blue for Anglo-Americans, orange for Latins, and yellow for Chinese. As Jansky zoomed down, he saw striped and polka-dotted patterns for the smaller groups, a couple of square kilometers for the Afrikaners and Coptic Christians.

Most of the Reich subjects had their pillars centered in their homelands, the Indians in New Delhi, the Quebecois in Montreal, and so on. In contrast, the “Anglo-Americans” had their pillar headquarters in the neighborhood of Golssen in South Berlin. Perhaps this was a “compromise” between Washington, London, or New York. More likely, the Nazis forced this choice because they wanted to keep the Anglo-Americans on a short leash. For Kyivan Americans, “Golssen” was a byword for an elite group that looked

down their noses at the peasants back home, who were always apologizing to the Germans for their uncouthness. But there was another perspective, memorably summed up by Dylan Foster. The Americans of Golssen give people the creeps because they look like time travelers from the distant future where local identities have disappeared. Where everyone speaks German all the time, where everyone reads the same (German) books, watches the same (German) tv stations, and picks clothing according to what the German magazines say is fashionable this year or that year. Where nobody cares whether 1969 was a “pre-emptive strike.” Where nobody has an American or Confederate flag buried beneath the floorboards. The Golssen Americans were referred to as “the Fuhrer’s step-children” and, Foster said, did not feel this insulting.

There was no such stereotype about the Russians of the three different Russian ghettos scattered throughout the city. For Russians, there were two kinds of ghettos: rich Ghettos like Kyiv and poor ghettos like Nora’s home of Adolfsberg. Jansky had wondered if, in the time of the diarists, some ghettos were regarded as more “Leftist” and others more “Rightist.” Despite the initial survival of prewar political loyalties, this didn’t seem to be the case. Why was this? Because the Russians could have no newspapers, magazines, or literary journals. Nobody wrote about this ghetto or that ghetto except to list dry, factual information, population, taxes paid, and so on. There was nothing like the “travelogues.” While it would be forbidden for the author of one to claim that one region of America was more “anti-Nazi” than another, it was possible to say one region was “full of national socialist spirit” while being silent in describing its neighbor. People read between the lines, and this ends up reinforcing the stereotype. A man who moves to Golssen knows he is “supposed to” be pro-Nazi. A man who moves to Northern England is supposed to be anti-Nazi. A man who moves to Kyiv is supposed to have a cynical, technocratic attitude, nothing platitudes when forced but not really caring which pieces of colored cloth people decide to consecrate.

While Jansky hadn’t heard any “stereotypes” about the North Berlin Easterner Ghetto, there were some things he could deduce from its economy. It was the richest of Berlin’s Russian ghettos and the closest to North Berlin, where the bureaucracies of the Nazi government were headquartered. Many of its people were “secretaries” to the big law firms. They wrote up contracts, wrote up petitions and defenses, and even wrote judgments in some cases. They did everything lawyers were supposed to do except show up in court. As much as tech people wanted to look down on it, lawyering was an O-ring industry, and it showed in the wages the “secretaries” were paid. The first-tier law firms rarely employed Russians directly, instead contracting with “secretarial contracting firms” owned by Russians. These firms were unlike Kyiv’s second-tier software firms in that powerful firms were rarely knocked off their perch by baby-faced startup founders. The same names continually ruled the roost. This predicted less of a divide between “new money” and “old

money” in the North Berlin Easterner Ghetto.

More speculatively, the Russians of North Berlin might be under more surveillance by the Kripo and Gestapo and thus more averse to rule-breaking. The stereotype among German policemen is that the ambitious go to Berlin and Hamburg, the unambitious stay in the low-crime German suburbs and rural areas, and the dumb, lazy, and brutal get sent to Russia or Africa. But Jansky didn’t know who the Berlin policemen were focusing on. It was most likely to be foreign diplomats and subject pillar officials, the men who could cause the most trouble for Litzer. But the police, even if not focusing on the subhumans, could not help but notice them. Perhaps something like the Kyiv Business Association, with subhumans in attendance, would not be possible in Berlin.

At 5:16 PM, they pulled into a tunnel and arrived at an underground train station. Jansky’s phone said it was a seven-mile bus ride to the ghetto. He could see the train station through the window, and it was quite dingy. The walls were covered in tiling, yellow squares with white tiles on the inside, both miscolored by time. The floor was concrete, darkened by time, grime, and dirt. Metal mesh benches were built into the wall. Supposedly they were designed so that they would not be too comfortable and people would not sit on them for too long. A flat-screen TV was attached to one of the walls, showing train times. Apart from the TV, the station was a window into the past.

About a dozen people were walking to and fro in the station, the majority of whom were Africans distinguishable by the “N” badges they wore. (“N” standing for German “Neger” – “black”) Their ancestors had been captured in “raids,” starting in 1970 and continuing up until 2053. The German conquest of Russia was portrayed by Nazi TV as a heroic fight against an enemy that was unintelligent but dangerous due to its numbers, American weapons, and “Judeo-Bolshevik” leadership. The “raids” on Africa were portrayed as minor affairs, “safaris” only dangerous to those who drank too much or didn’t listen to the safari guides. Though they were portrayed as bestial in their “natural state,” blacks in Germany were usually portrayed as tame, childlike, and not particularly dangerous. Moreso than the Russians, they were relegated to unskilled jobs, but a notable black middle class existed, particularly in Berlin and Hamburg.

Once the train stopped, the rail policemen stood in front of the door, and the people started lining up. One by one, the policemen checked people’s IDs and tickets and then let them through. One man was doing all the work. The other seemed to be “supervising.” They could have attempted to speed it up by doing two people at once. But why bother? They were employed by the state, not the Riechsbahn, and certainly didn’t have to care for the subhumans’ time. Jansky remembered the standard advice when faced with soldiers or policemen. Do not look proud, defiant, happy, or angry. The best look is a little bit tired and a little bit afraid, but only a little bit. After about fifteen

people were let through, the “supervising” policeman started standing to the side and having a phone conversation in some Latin language, leaving all the work for the other guy. The three got to the front and made it through without incident. They walked to one of the concrete staircases and climbed what seemed like two stories, seeing more and more natural light as they ascended.

They reached the ground floor and saw train tracks to their left and right. The ground floor of the train station was not as run-down as the underground, but not pretty either. Yumatov whispered to Toma and Nora and spoke in Russian. “The stations used to be much cleaner back when Germans rode,” he said. It made sense.

Jansky’s phone told him where to go, about two blocks to the bus station. As they walked, Jansky looked through the crowd, a mélange of colors and costumes. There were whites, Latins, Blacks, Middle-Easterners, and East Asians. About a third were Africans wearing the badge. Some wore business suits, others casual clothing, others ethnic garb. There were no Russians. In spite of all the knowledge he had, all the countries, provinces, and cities he could identify on the map, he had only ever been to Kyiv and Adolfsberg. He had never been in an area where Russians were so small a minority. He wondered if Yumatov was speaking from experience when he said that the train stations used to be cleaner. He certainly didn’t give off the vibe of the world traveler. He seemed like a sheltered aristocrat. But perhaps he wasn’t. Jansky, in any case, could see no reason to bring up the subject.

The North Berlin Easterner Ghetto was seven miles Northwest and could easily be identified by its tall, undecorated skyscrapers. In one patch of the ghetto, eighteen sixty-story towers were connected by external structural support beams, though Jansky could not see them from his present angle. If the experiment is successful, the pattern may become common.

Once they arrived at the bus stop, they met many other Russians, a few of whom Jansky recognized from the train. Most of those waiting there were Russian, though there were a few others who perhaps lived close to the ghetto checkpoint. Jansky was not in the mood for a chat and would have guessed that the same was true for Yumatov and his wife. But this was evidently not communicated to the thirty-something man who approached them, who had dark hair, dark eyes, and tan skin.

“Hello,” the man said in Russian. “I recognized you from the train. Councilman Alik Yumatov and Toma Jansky, right? My name is Stanislav Olov,” he said, extending his hand.

Yumatov reached forward first and shook his hand. “Yes, I am Councilman Yumatov,” he said.

Jansky had been pondering whether to deny their identities, but that was no longer an option. “Yes, I am Toma Jansky,” he said as he shook Olov’s hand. He turned to Nora. “This is my wife Nora.”

Nora reached out and shook his hand.

“Pleased to meet you,” Olov said.

“Pleased to meet you as well,” Nora said.

“So what brings you to the World Capital?” Olov asked, smiling.

The “World Capital” was a forbidden designation for Berlin, as in the Nazi fantasy Rome and Tokyo were supposedly its equal. Olov said it in Russian, to be sure, and there were no policemen nearby, but it still unnerved Jansky. Jansky gave Yumatov the chance to answer the question first, but Yumatov didn’t look like he wanted to, so Jansky answered. “Government-related business,” he said.

The man smiled. “Details are secret, I assume?”

“I’m afraid so,” Jansky said.

“I understand,” Olov said. “My company’s like that, a lot of pointless secrecy.”

Jansky did not smile or otherwise do anything to confirm or deny Olov’s assumption. “So, what brings you to Berlin?” Jansky asked.

“Work,” Olov said. Olov proceeded to complain about his employer, complaints he continued as they boarded the bus. He was an engineer of some type at a window-pane manufacturer. As they approached the ghetto, Olov realized he had little time left and gave Jansky a business card with his name on it, asking if Jansky knew anyone in need of talent. Jansky took it and told Olov he’d think about it. He had no intention of doing so. The man was an idiot for bashing his employer in a semi-public environment. He would not do well in climbing the corporate ladder, for he did not understand a basic social rule: flatter the person you want something from instead of talking about yourself.

They got off the bus and entered the checkpoint. Olov and some others led the way to the luggage-permitting area. As in the Sugenlar, the place was very quiet. The soldiers processing the people were East Asians. Japanese, Jansky realized as he saw their insignia. Also like the Sugenlar, the checkpoint was bare of ornamentation, with concrete, steel, and signs threatening concentration camps. There was a Nazi song coming from the speakers that Jansky didn’t recognize. “The thrill of the hunt! We will strike down the enemies of our Volk! Glory to Litzer; our Volksgemeinschaft stands united! Jewry stands no chance of corrupting us!” It was a German song in the style of American rock music.

They made their way up some concrete stairs to a windowless room with all the usual luggage-scanning equipment arranged into five different lines. There was no music, and the room was quiet except for two Japanese soldiers conversing in what was presumably Japanese. Olov got in one line and Jansky, his wife, and Yumatov got in another. It took about ten minutes to get to the front of the line, as the soldiers in charge let everyone through with no comment. But the baby-faced Japanese soldier stopped when Yumatov gave him his pass. The soldier’s face lit up when he read it. Jansky presumed it was the word “pillar councilman” that did it.

“Wait here,” the soldier said in a firm voice. He turned around and walked

toward an unmarked door which he knocked on. The door opened, and the man went in. A minute later, he returned with a man who was older and had more decorations on his uniform. The man walked over to Yumatov, who held out his pass. The man grabbed it rather rudely and stared at it for about fifteen seconds. Then he gave the pass back to Yumatov, said something to the soldier in Japanese, and walked off. The soldier then photocopied the pass, checked Yumatov's ID and ELD, checked his iris and fingerprints, put his bag through the bag-scanning machine, and let him through. He did the same for Toma and Nora Jansky, all without saying a word. Jansky assumed the soldier was unsure of what to do in the event of a "big fish" and checked with his superior, who was annoyed at being disturbed.

The three continued into the ghetto, where three bus stops were separated by concrete sidewalks and a group of around two dozen steel benches. The Reich Navigation System, which had told Jansky how to get from the train station to the ghetto, did not work inside the ghetto. Likely this would be the case forever, for why would they want to help subhumans? The group thus walked toward a display case that featured bus schedules and a large map of the ghetto. The North Kyiv Ghetto was roughly circular, a shape that maximized the ratio of the area to the perimeter and saved money on the wall. In contrast, the North Berlin Easterner Ghetto was a rough trapezoid, the sides of which were jagged, protruding a block or two inwards in some places and outwards in others. Jansky assumed this was due to political considerations. The North Kyiv Ghetto was built on the site of German Latifunda, whose absentee owners were eager to sell as they were never particularly profitable. The ghettos around Berlin, in contrast, were built on areas where the *Herrenvolk* lived and worked. Some wanted to sell, others didn't, and the ghetto was built to take their preferences into account. Unlike the North to South and East to West streets of North Kyiv, North Berlin's streets were irregular, with three large avenues extending Northwest from their present checkpoint.

The bus map showed many sites a tourist could see. The "Grand Russian Mall" at Teloni. The "stock floor" at Solnechnogorsk. There were five different "observatories" hugging the boundaries of the ghetto, where people could stand at the top of skyscrapers and look through telescopes at all the parts of Berlin they were excluded from. But there was no time for any of that. They were headed to one particular landmark, the Pillar Headquarters, as Yumatov told them Telev wanted to meet them that evening. The seat of government was located on the most horizontal of the three avenues, about three blocks from the ghetto's border and in an oddly non-central location. It was close to another ghetto checkpoint, which perhaps mattered more. The three made their way to the bus stop to their left and sat and waited for the bus that would come in not more than five minutes.

The buildings of the ghetto were the same as any other, not surprisingly. The people seemed more formal, with more men in suits than Jansky thought

would be the case in North Kyiv. There were still many people in t-shirts and work clothes, but Jansky figured there were fewer engineers and middle-management people whose employers let them go around “casually.” After a few minutes, they boarded the bus. As many were returning to the ghetto from work, the bus was crowded and all three had to stand.

They reached the pillar headquarters and walked south to the eighty-story concrete box. The lobby was rather underwhelming. It was very clean, cleaner than most office lobbies, but looked otherwise similar, with white walls and white tiling, with no artworks or portraits on the walls, though there was the red-blue-green pillar seal, featuring only the ghetto’s acronym, N. B. O. G. There were no places to sit. They headed to the bathrooms, which Jansky found nice enough. He then changed into his business suit and met up with Nora and Yumatov, who did the same. There was a directory on one of the walls, which read “pillar headquarters, floors 74-80, elevator E.” They walked to the elevator, which was hidden behind a steel gate turnstile. There was a scanner next to the turnstile that Jansky presumed would allow regular employees to access. To the right of the turnstile was a plastic box in which sat a young man in a white dress shirt and a black tuxedo vest. Yumatov walked up to the window, and the man briefly looked up from his papers and said, “I’ll be with you in a second.”

While Yumatov stood silent for some seconds, Jansky was not in a mood to wait. “We have a meeting with the President,” he said to the man.

The man was handsome and sported a crew cut. He looked up at Jansky skeptically for about four seconds before he picked up a phone and called somebody.

“Maria,” he said. “Hi, I’ve got three people claiming they have an appointment with President Telev.”

“Okay,” he said after a second. He hung up the phone and looked to the group.

“IDs,” he said.

The three handed them over, and after he looked them over, the man let them through.

“Which floor do we go to?” Yumatov asked.

The man looked incredulous, as presumably the location of the President’s office was common knowledge. “Floor eighty,” he said.

“Thank you,” Yumatov said.

They walked through the turnstile and entered the elevator, which was uncommonly quick as it ascended the first seventy-four floors, slowing as it reached the top. Finally, it stopped at the eightieth floor. The lobby they entered into contrasted greatly with the lobby below, with tan and black couches and reclining chairs oriented around black coffee tables and a large window with a view of the north of the ghetto. A woman in a business suit was sitting on a chair and talking on the phone. There was also a policeman in blue who started walking over to the group.

“You are the delegation from Kyiv?” the policeman asked.

“Yes,” said Yumatov.

The policeman was powerfully built and at least six feet four, with short blond hair and brown eyes. He led the group to a set of double wooden doors, which opened once he entered a code and put his thumb into a scanner. The group turned a corner and walked through a hall. Hanging on the walls were portraits of men unknown to Jansky and detailed maps of the world, the Reich, and Berlin. They finally entered a large room. There were windows to the south, through which Jansky could see the old city of Berlin and the Volkshalle. There was a pool table, a soda machine, a coffee machine, a flat-screen TV, and a set of three blue couches. Sitting on one was a man Jansky recognized as President Andrei Telev.

Telev had yellowish-tan skin, short black-gray hair, brown eyes, and no facial hair. He was sixty-one but looked younger and wore a black suit with a black tie. He looked happy and sure of himself, like the world was his oyster. Yumatov sat down on a couch that faced Telev, while Jansky sat to his right and Nora to his left.

“You must be President Telev,” Yumatov said.

“Yes,” Telev responded. “But I ain’t your President. Call me Andrei.”

“And you can call me Alik,” Yumatov said.

“Me, Toma.”

“Me, Nora.”

“Pleased to meet you all,” Telev said. “So, who’s in charge here?”

Yumatov was sitting in the center and spoke first, implicitly confirming his position of seniority. “No one’s in charge.”

“Oh, come on,” Telev said. “There’s always someone making the decisions, and he isn’t necessarily the person with the most senior title.”

Yumatov looked annoyed. “We don’t have time for this,” he said.

Telev shrugged. “Alright, I’ll cut to the chase,” he said. “I have a few friends in your ghetto, and based on what they tell me, I suspect Toma Jansky is the originator of this idea.”

“I don’t have anything to say to that,” Yumatov said.

Telev turned to Jansky and smiled. Jansky looked back at him skeptically. “Do you have some reason to be suspicious of our offer?” Jansky said.

“Yes, I do. First, tell me why it is necessary.”

“Anton Linov is sick or is pretending to be,” Yumatov said. “His chosen successor is a man we do not want to elect. We feel that a man with experience in government recommended by yourself will be the best option for our ghetto.”

Telev smiled. “So why not vote for yourself?”

“I have no desire to become President.”

“I don’t think you’re telling me the truth,” Telev said. “I think you want to be President.”

Telev’s tone was friendly, like the two were in a debating club. But

Yumatov's facial expression showed he was not in the mood for a friendly argument. He was silent for several seconds. "If you think we're dicking around with you, we can stop wasting your time and go ask the leadership of a different ghetto to recommend a candidate. The position being offered is not janitorial work, and we will find a candidate sooner or later."

Jansky was surprised at Yumatov's candor but couldn't say it was unwise. Yumatov was an aristocrat who did not need to be deferential to Telev. And he had a point. Other Presidents would jump at the opportunity.

Telev smiled. "Okay, you don't want to be President. Are there not those in the North Kyiv Ghetto who would do the job? Why do you need to come all the way here?"

Yumatov looked ticked off. He turned to Toma. "Why don't you explain our reasoning," he said in an annoyed voice.

Jansky looked to Telev. "We are trying to make the case that Anton Linov's son, Taras Linov, is unfit for office. The argument is much more credible if we aren't saying 'pick me instead.' Furthermore, there are certain disagreements in the ghetto we think would benefit from a fresh set of eyes."

"Here's what I'm afraid of," Telev said. "You want me to give you a face, a voice, a personality, a flesh and blood candidate to bring back to the ghetto. But your goal is not to elect that person. Your goal is to use his presence to say, 'this is your alternative. 'You want someone neutral? Here's your someone neutral!' Believing that the devil you know is better than the devil you don't know, the council panics and elects Mr. Yumatov. My candidate returns with nothing, and I look like I take part in coups against other ghettos."

Jansky thought about expressing the opinion that it is not a coup for the system to work as intended. But that would be a mere semantic objection. As much as he didn't want to admit it, Telev had a point.

"That is not my plan," Yumatov said. "If you are not willing to trust my word on the matter, I suppose I can leave and apologize for wasting our time. I can only appeal to you as a fellow Russian. Our ghetto needs this."

Telev had his poker face on, and Jansky considered making a threat. If Telev's ghetto was anything like Jansky's, the demand for jobs in the pillar far exceeded the supply. What if it got out that Telev turned down the chance to give one of the unsatisfied office-seekers the greatest office a Russian could hold, *President of a Ghetto*? But he didn't want to escalate the situation if he didn't need to.

After some silence, Telev looked two Yumatov. "I have two conditions. Condition one, my candidate does not enter the North Kyiv Ghetto under any circumstances until the Presidential office is vacant. Provided the President of the South Kyiv Ghetto allows it, he may go to the South Kyiv Ghetto. If not, he stays here. Condition two: an email is sent to all pillar councilmen in North Kyiv Ghetto informing them of his presence, that a delegation made up of individuals named Alik Yumatov, Toma Jansky, and Nora Jansky requested

him, and that he will not enter the North Kyiv Ghetto until the President's office is vacant."

Yumatov looked to Toma Jansky. "What do you think of the offer's conditions?"

"They seem reasonable enough," he said.

Yumatov turned to Nora, who nodded.

"Assuming we like your candidate, we accept the offer," Yumatov said.

"Man's in the other room, has been listening in on the conversation."

Jansky was unnerved by this but tried not to show it.

"Who is he?" Yumatov asked.

"Vladimir Ravkov."

"A member of your family?"

"No."

Yumatov looked surprised.

"That shouldn't be surprising," Telev said. "I want my family here." He turned around and went out one of the doors. A moment later, another man came out.

"Hello," the man said. "I am Vladimir Ravkov."

Ravkov had greyish-black hair, brown eyes, tanned skin, and a black mustache. He wore the standard black business suit with a light grey tie. He appeared to Jansky to be around fifty and carried a small manilla folder. Ravkov reached out and shook Nora's hand, then Yumatov's, then Toma's. He then sat in the place on the couch previously occupied by Telev.

"Pleased to meet you all," Ravkov said. He then opened the folder and pulled out a paper which he handed to Toma Jansky. He then got two more copies and gave them to Yumatov and Nora. The document was Ravkov's resume, two sheets of paper stapled together. Jansky's eyes were quickly directed to the most important information. Ravkov's age was forty-seven. Young enough to give him an eighteen-year term but not so young that he wouldn't be taken seriously. He was married and had four children, daughters aged sixteen and twelve and sons aged nine and seven. It was clearly not a standard resume, but something typed up for this particular job. At the bottom of page one was a section entitled "family background," detailing the fact that Ravkov's cousin, Joseph Lusis, was a current member of the Berlin pillar council. Ravkov's uncle, grandfather, and great-grandfather had all been council members. Also on the first page was Ravkov's work history. He spent two years in school becoming an accountant and started as a secretary in the pillar's records department. At age twenty-four, he was hired as an accountant at the Petrov Utility company, which had "about 250 employees," according to the resume. He advanced up the company and spent nine years as its CEO. For the past four years as the Vice President of the ghetto's tax department. All told, the resume had no red flags.

After Toma, Nora, and Yumatov finished looking through the resume, they all looked back to Ravkov, who gave them a confident smile.

“So,” Yumatov said, “tell us about yourself.”

Ravkov was about to answer when Yumatov decided to revise his question. “Specifically,” Yumatov said, “what would you be giving up to come to Kyiv?”

“A council seat for my son,” Ravkov said.

“Explain,” said Yumatov.

“Well, my cousin has no children. If he were to pass away, my uncle is of course too old, as is my mother, leaving me. But I am forty-seven, and he is forty; by the time he retires, I too will be too old to serve. Leaving my son.”

“If you accept our offer,” Yumatov said, “will you leave with us tomorrow?”

“Yes.”

“And you will bring your family with you?”

“Eventually, yes.”

“Who will take your place on the council?”

“That will be for Telev to decide.”

“Explain.”

“Until the productivization mandate, our family was not a particularly virile one. My cousin Joseph Lusis has no children. He is an only child, and so am I. We have no other cousins. So the closest relative is a second cousin.”

“Not counting your own children.”

“Yes. As to what jobs they will seek, it will be up to them.”

There was an awkward pause as nobody spoke up. “Do you have any other questions,” Ravkov said.

Jansky had many but hadn’t wanted to outshine his patron Yumatov. He knew he would almost certainly advise Yumatov to offer Ravkov the job no matter what, but he didn’t want his desperation to show. Ravkov should feel indebted to him.

“How did your family come to be on the North Berlin pillar council?” Jansky asked. The story itself wouldn’t reveal much about Ravkov’s personality. After all, he shared 1/8th of his great grandfather’s genes and none of his upbringing. But how Ravkov told the story would be revealing. Would he be argumentative, say the question was unimportant or none of Jansky’s business? Would he claim that there was nothing more important than family? Would he try to deny that nepotism was why he was on the council?

Ravkov was silent for some time and had a look of reminiscence. “Latvia,” he said. “Lusis, my mother’s maiden name, is a Latvian surname. My ancestors fought with the Bolsheviks during the Civil War and moved to Pskov in Russia after independence. During WWII, they were snatched up as *Ostarbeiters*. They were told they would be sent home when the war ended. The German capitalists did not want to give up their slave laborers, and so they stayed. The “temporary” barracks set up next to factories became impromptu ghettos. The SS did not like the headache of managing thousands

of mini-ghettos on private lands. Usually, they got their way and concentrated us into special districts that became ghettos. One of the last holdouts was the Schröder armament factory complex, which housed 40,000 on its private grounds. The Lusis family and the Telev family were there providing security. When the SS finally “nationalized” the ghetto in 2007, my great-grandfather was a natural choice to sit on its council.”

Ravkov paused and contemplated for a few seconds, then continued. “At the time, we were regarded as a bunch of traitors and collaborators. My great grandfather never ate in restaurants for fear of being poisoned. The ghetto was then a wholly proletarian place. Anyone who came into money planned to move to Russia. Most everyone worked in the factories outside and tried as best they could to minimize their interaction with us, the pillar. In public, they kept their head down. In private, they expressed their hatred, which served to bind together the common people. But in the 2010s and 2020s, Berlin went from an industrial city to one dependent on government and the service sector. As did Berlin, so did the ghetto, which became a much more middle-class place. The new middle class lived and worked entirely within our walls, and they no longer wanted to avoid us but wanted our friendship, to assure we didn’t favor their competitors, whether actively or passively. So what happened to the oppositional attitude they had toward us?” Ravkov made a “poof” motion with his hands. “Gone, just like that,” he said, “because maintaining it would have been costly. I’ve heard that in your ghetto, there’s this tension between the old money and the new money. I’m sure it seems like something that will be timeless and eternal. It might, but it doesn’t need to be.”

“And you could help us end it,” Yumatov said.

“If you would give me the opportunity, I’ll try my best,” Ravkov said.

Yumatov did not look particularly impressed by Ravkov, while Jansky was. He saw some “holes” in the narrative. He wondered if Ravkov was telling the truth about his ancestors being *Ostarbieters*. It was certainly possible, but it was also possible they were policemen recruited from Russia itself. There were many who offered themselves to the Wehrmacht as “traffic policemen” in 1941, many more than the Nazis needed. Jansky also noted that Ravkov’s point about the ease of forgetting was not as neat as he made it out to be. The ghetto had been transformed both geographically and demographically as the factories closed. As more and more people moved to Berlin, the Nazis gradually moved the ghetto north, so that eventually the original ghetto was entirely outside it. It also expanded in population, receiving many migrants from Russia, and most of its current residents were not descended from the original people. Still, Jansky thought Ravkov’s point was basically correct. He had never believed in “historical trauma.” People are traumatized by what they lived through. They are only traumatized by the experiences of their grandparents if they choose to be. And he was impressed with Ravkov’s intelligence. He wondered if Telev selected him because he

was too smart for his own good. Alternatively, he could have chosen him as the man most likely to appeal to Jansky.

“How did your parents raise you?”

“I was never expected to be a councilman, but a councilman’s cousin,” Ravkov said. “A man who would have an easier time than most in getting high positions in the pillar but who would still need to fight for them. We all know the stereotype of us aristocrats. The teachers at my school knew it and tried to instill in us a duty to transcend it. They assigned us many books, and my parents ensured that I read them. There was the *Economics of Subhumanity* series, then considered seminal. I read about the world of the workers, though to be honest, I never visited a *plattenbau*, not until I was around forty years old. I also read about the world outside, though there, too, I was content to know the world of beaches and speed limits only from the books.”

Jansky nodded, indicating that he was satisfied with the response. He looked down at Ravkov’s resume. “Describe your career in the private sector.”

“Well, before I worked at Petrov Utility, I worked there,” he said, pointing down. “The records department, floor five. It was much larger then, before digitization. Really I was just a not-so-glorified librarian, dealing with a catalog of documents, birth and death records, marriage certificates and prenups, copies of business contracts, etcetera, etcetera. Mostly it was a bore. But I did gain some knowledge. I learned which records people often requested and which they didn’t. What was important and what wasn’t.”

“Did the Nazis ever barge in?” asked Jansky

“A few times. Sometimes I explained to a Gestapo man how the records worked. They never said what they were looking for. We fax all documents to them, so, in theory, they had them all already. But getting back to the question, I was really there to build up experience in the pillar government. Petrov Utility needed people with that kind of experience, as it contracted mainly with the pillar. I then worked my way up the hierarchy.”

“How much competition did the company have?”

“Some. The pillar doesn’t like overpaying for its gas and water, for the more it pays, the less it has for salaries. So we had pressure to keep costs down.”

“How do you deal with subordinates who don’t measure up?”

“It depended on who they were. If they were nobody, it was easy enough for the brain, if not for the heart. If they were somebody, I had to proceed delicately. I tried my best to encourage such people to pursue more glamorous lines of work. There were some who I had to bite the bullet on. I would receive a call asking why so and so was fired, for the man’s relative wanted to “help” the boy with ‘advice.’ For others, I gave them a corner office with minimal responsibilities.”

“So why did you go into the tax department?” Jansky asked.

“My cousin was Vice President and was promoted to President. And I did want the job. People sometimes ask me if being a tax man makes me unpopular. The exact opposite is the case. The tax man is very popular.”

“I would imagine so,” Jansky said.

Jansky wondered if Ravkov’s family owned the Petrov Utility Company. Ravkov had been vague about how exactly he “worked his way up the hierarchy,” and one could choose to fill gaps with unflattering detail. Perhaps Ravkov assumed this and considered it par for the course. Regardless, Jansky was confident that Ravkov wasn’t the dumbest person with a management position in that company.

Jansky nodded approvingly. “Those are all my questions,” Jansky said. “Do you have any questions for us?”

“Yes,” Ravkov said. “Considering the need to move fast, should we speak frankly rather than slow ourselves down by indirect, euphemistic questions?”

Yumatov looked annoyed by the question but responded with “yes,” while Nora and Toma Jansky nodded their agreement. Jansky smiled, an honest reflection of his feelings. He was tired and didn’t feel like getting bogged down in euphemisms.

“Alright. Are there any conditions I must meet? Things you would like me to do, assuming I become President?”

“I want nothing,” Yumatov said unemotionally.

Ravkov turned to Toma Jansky, who briefly had a mental panic before he remembered that he had prepared for this question and cleared his answer with Yumatov. “I would like a position in the pillar council as an advisor to the President,” he said.

Ravkov smiled. “And what advice would you like to give me?”

“I could advise you about the people and culture of North Kyiv, about who you can trust and who you cannot, about the situation outside the ghetto with regards to the Kyiv Business Association, the leaders of which I know personally, about financial markets and the financial industry of North Kyiv, which I have worked in, about the private schools and social clubs of North Kyiv, and so on.”

Ravkov looked at him skeptically. “The thing about the advisor/advisee relationship is that the advisee can ignore the advice. Are there any pieces of advice that you *really* want me to take?”

“No,” Jansky said.

“Really? No policy you want me to enact, no enemies you want me to remove?”

“None I want so much that I would offer them as conditions. To convince the pillar council to select you, we want you to say, openly and truthfully, ‘I am beholden to no one. I have made promises to no one.’ When I say I’d like to be hired as your advisor, it’s not a condition. You are free to reject it.”

“You want a job as advisor, you’ve got a job as advisor,” Ravkov said. “How much money do you want?”

“275,000 Weltmarks,” Jansky said. The ‘standard’ pay rate for those who wanted nepotistic jobs with minimal responsibility put one at the lower end of the upper class. Most who took it had investment income to complement it. Even without that, the income would be enough to afford a nice apartment and private schooling for his children.

Ravkov got a pen and a small blue notepad from his suit pocket and wrote something down. He then plucked the blue paper and showed it to the group. It read, “Toma Jansky, advisor, 275,000 WM.” He folded it up, put it in his pocket, and then turned to Nora. “And you,” he said.

Nora Jansky looked uneasily at her husband.

Toma once more mentally panicked. He could be fairly described as being qualified for the position. His wife could not. “We can discuss a position for her at a later time,” Toma said. “As we all agree, time is of the essence.”

Ravkov smiled, then looked down at his notepad. He wrote a note, plucked it off, and showed it to the group. “Nora Jansky, some position, discuss later, nothing specific requested.” He then looked at Yumatov. “So, just to make sure that I have everyone’s agreement, I will go to the members of the council and tell them that I have not promised anyone anything; I will hire the people I want to hire, fire the people I want to fire, implement the policies I feel are best. You’re gonna get your position as advisor,” he said, turning to Toma. “But I won’t promise it.”

Toma Jansky and Yumatov nodded.

Ravkov smiled. “Now, what kind of council will I be looking at?”

“If you get elected, you will have at least seven supporters,” Yumatov said, stating an obvious mathematical fact. “I can’t tell you if you will have oppositionists or how many.”

“I might have the unanimous support of everyone?” Ravkov asked skeptically.

“The future is hard to predict,” Yumatov said. “I believe that the most likely scenario is that you will have three or four oppositionists on the council, but that in a decade, everyone will support you. A similar situation to this occurred in our ghetto’s early history. Vladimir Usachyov wanted his daughter-in-law to succeed him. She did not. For a while, there was a faction of Usachyov loyalists. But over the years, they realized they were serving an extinct cause.”

“People can be awfully stubborn,” Ravkov said. “Look at all the pretenders to the French throne. French monarchism declined and eventually died out but did so very slowly. And hey, sometimes the pretenders got their thrones back.”

“It’s possible,” Yumatov said.

Ravkov smiled like a teacher proud of his student for getting the “right” answer. “It’s an occupational hazard, I guess,” Ravkov said.

Yumatov nodded.

“Do you think the pretender, Taras Linov, will leave the ghetto?”

“Probably,” Yumatov said. “He has no interest in governance. He wants the position because it has been part of his identity for so long that not getting it would be a grand humiliation. But once that wears off, he will realize that ‘deposed prince with a lot of money’ opens a lot of doors in other ghettos. He’ll depart for Moscow, and the rest of us will forget him.”

Jansky disagreed. Taras Linov would not want to leave friends and his past and current romantic partners. People with his kind of unintelligent, low-class personality don’t tend to have wanderlust. Nor would he feel the sting of shame. He’d stay and look for vengeance. Perhaps that was better, Jansky thought. If he was in exile, his supporters still in the ghetto could imagine him as nobler than he really is.

“Alright,” Ravkov said. “What are areas of disagreement among the council?”

“We do have our disagreements on policy matters,” Yumatov said. “But the disagreement between the faction supporting Linov and people like myself is entirely on the question of succession to the Presidency.”

“It’s wholly personalist, nothing to do with policy or ideology?”

“Correct.”

“I have heard that there is a big divide between the new and old money. While I expect most council members would belong to the latter, are some more favorable to the new money than others?”

“Perhaps,” Yumatov said.

Ravkov looked ever so slightly frustrated with the non-response but was presumably trying to suppress it. He smiled. “Sometimes there are two orthogonal divisions, A to B and X to Y. But people want to simplify the world, so assign A to X and B to Y, even though there is no actual correlation. You go around thinking about the new-money vs. old division, learn that there’s a division on the council, and project the first onto the second.”

Yumatov shrugged. “I never been much of a sociologist,” he said.

Ravkov smiled, though Jansky didn’t think Yumatov meant it as a joke. “Well,” he said, “that’s all the questions I have.”

Yumatov turned to Toma and Nora Jansky. “You have any more questions?” he asked.

They both shook their heads negatively.

Chapter 19

The train left Berlin on the mourning of Friday, May 24, 2097, carrying the “delegation” from Kyiv, Vladimir Ravkov, and two assistants/bodyguards. The two men sitting between Ravkov and the aisle were big, at least six feet tall, with short hair, one blond and the other black. They were neither ugly nor handsome, and both appeared around thirty. Jansky assumed they were off-duty policemen, but Ravkov had made clear he didn’t want any questions about their presence. In theory, it was illegal for subhumans to have

bodyguards when outside the ghettos, though this was difficult to enforce.

As Toma Jansky sat on the train, again facing the window, he thought of an interesting historical parallel. For many years before 1939, Joseph Stalin wanted better relations with Nazi Germany. The possibility of taking him up on the offer was always there, discussed in the German foreign service, but only in whispers, as Hitler vetoed the idea. But when he finally decided to change his mind, crossed the proverbial Rubicon, he wanted the agreement concluded immediately. Ribbentrop was dispatched to Moscow and returned in a manner of days. The idea of breaking with Maslak had long been there in Jansky's mind, but he told himself a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush. But when he released the bird, crossed the rubicon, he would get what he wanted very quickly.

The train ride was uneventful and gave Jansky time to think about the future. He wondered about the degree to which Ravkov would "clear out the deadwood." In telling the story about the utility company, he implied he would do so to the extent it doesn't result in angry council members deposing him. But maybe he only said it because he thought it was what Jansky wanted to hear. Maybe Ravkov would be content to just sit around collecting his salary, allowing the system to run on auto-pilot. Most day-to-day decision-making could be outsourced to department heads. He'd be called on to make a decision when they came into conflict, but he needn't put much thought into it. That was a nightmare scenario, and as Jansky thought about it more and more, he realized he didn't care *that* much about it. The important thing was getting his salary and assuring his family was safe.

They arrived in Pasazhyrskyi and the groups went their separate ways, Yumatov and the Jansky's to North Kyiv and Ravkov and his men to the main ghetto. As soon as he got off the train, Jansky called his friend Ilya Valentyn and made small talk for fifteen minutes. He was relieved the man hadn't heard about the "crisis." Nor did Jansky's parents or Nora's friends. The Jansky's picked up their children, went home, and had a good night's sleep.

The next day Jansky called Yumatov, who told him that the "decision" would likely be made that day. But there was nothing he could do, so he, Nora, and the children stayed home until 3:47 PM, when they received a knock on the door. Jansky looked through the peephole at Kondrat Pavlov. Jansky was then wearing shorts and a t-shirt but decided to change into his business suit and red tie. He then answered the door, with Nora standing five steps behind him and listening.

"Hello," Pavlov said, looking plain and unemotional as usual. "Your presence is requested in the Pillar Council Chamber."

"What for?"

"I do not know."

It could be a trick, Jansky thought. Perhaps Pavlov would make a detour to the jail. But he couldn't not go. "Alright," Jansky said. "I guess I'll follow you there."

Pavlov turned and Jansky followed him, walking silently down the hall and then down the elevator. Once they walked out of the lobby and into the street, Jansky spoke.

“How much do you know about all of this political stuff?” Jansky said in a friendly tone.

Pavlov just kept walking.

“Is there some policy that you aren’t supposed to fraternize with us?” Jansky asked.

Pavlov had no response.

“Alright, have it your way,” Jansky said. “I’ll just tell you, I bet things will be quite different a week from now.”

Pavlov did not respond, and Jansky imagined him thinking, “you think I give a s***, kid?” They walked into the Yamel Tower lobby and then entered the Presidential section. The last time Pavlov had led Jansky right, to Linov’s office. This time he turned left and led him to a plain office door labeled “Council Chamber,” guarded by a very tall, swarthy-looking policeman.

“This him?” the guard asked.

“Yes,” Pavlov said.

The guard held out a fingerprint scanner, which Jansky used. He then checked Jansky’s ID. Satisfied, the man moved over, and Jansky opened the door to the Council Chamber. For all the time Jansky spent thinking about the council, he had never actually seen the Council Chamber. Sometimes he imagined it as medieval, other times a futuristic space station. Usually, though, he thought of it as an abstract white rectangle, with each council member a differently colored dot. Linov’s loyalists colored blue to the left, Maslak colored yellow to the right, the swing voters colored gray in the middle.

The actual room was nothing to write home about. It had a large, brown, oval-shaped office table that could seat sixteen. The chairs were brown, wooden, padded, and nondescript. The room was rectangular; at the end opposite Jansky was a window. Jansky would have expected some technology for power-point presentations or video calls. There was nothing of the kind in the room, just some cabinets, another door, an overhead light, the pillar seal, and a table for coffee and tea. Every council member was there, as was Linov and his lawyer Arkady Balandin, both sitting down at the end of the table. Two uniformed policemen stood a few feet from the table and looked to Jansky. It was evident the council had been meeting for quite a while, for there was a morass of papers, cups, and cables charging computers on the table.

Yuri Maslak was smiling the standard Machiavellian smile. Others were smiling uneasily. Shishov Yakovich, Roman Shvets, and Yana Kobzar looked worried and worn out. Artur Savel looked to Jansky with the blank policeman’s stare. After a few moments of silence, Linov stood up and walked over to Toma Jansky, who stood close to the door. He then turned and

faced the council.

“Who is this man?” Linov asked, his hands pointed to Jansky. “Toma Jansky is a man who spent years and years kissing Yuri Maslak’s a**, laughing at his jokes, pretending to believe in his theories. Telling others Maslak was brilliant. And then he suddenly changes his mind, decides that Maslak is in fact unfit to be President.” He paused, paced back and forth, and then looked to the council again. “But he isn’t an unstable man, not exactly. He hasn’t changed his mind. He simply concluded that his good friend Yuri was no longer useful to him. Now, Yumatov is his *cat’s paw*, and he hopes this new man, Ravkov, will be as well. But while you may grow more and less useful over time, his opinion of you will never really change. All of you are his enemy. All of you were born into wealth. All of you were born into positions where people would listen to you. You are all the same to him, aristocrats who ought to be thrown to the wolves but who can be used as useful idiots for short periods. Why he’s like this, I don’t know. He wasn’t born in poverty, that’s for sure. Maybe he’s mad other kids bullied him, laughed at him, didn’t let them into their clubs. Maybe he’s mad other guys got the girl, and he didn’t. Regardless, he is a man who will never be satisfied with a comfortable job and financial security. He will keep trying to incite the world against you until you’ve been thrown out and replaced with his friends. His *real* friends.”

Linov paused and looked pained. Presumably, he was trying to mentally fetch the speech he had memorized. “You’ve all read his police report. At age nineteen, he went around claiming that he predicted July 11. Made all these grandiose claims. You may want to give him the benefit of the doubt, to think he’s grown out of it. You shouldn’t. The man in the police report is the real Toma Jansky, revealing the part of his personality he later learned to conceal. When a grown man punches you, you defend yourself. When a four-year-old punches you, you probably just roll your eyes. I’m sure the police considered arresting him but went, ‘ah, he’s harmless. Just a baby-faced nerd. Nobody’s gonna follow him.’ As he climbed higher and higher, people kept hesitating, unsure if they should go through the trouble to knock him off the perch. After all, he’ll probably just trip and fall. But now it’s time to hit back. Do you think he will magically disappear if you elect Vladimir Ravkov? Do you really believe the lies of Alik Yumatov, that Ravkov has not agreed to any conditions? That his puppet-master Toma just offered him the job on a silver platter?”

Several council members were scowling, though Jansky couldn’t know if it was at Linov or at him. Some might have been the target of accusations that they were being manipulated by younger, smarter, non-aristocratic ‘advisors.’ Linov’s line of attack could easily backfire.

“Even if you think that Toma Jansky will magically disappear, you are fools if you think you can go along with this coup and that the aftermath will be contained to this room. Revolutions are followed by revolutions. Coups are

followed by coups. Rodzianko is followed by Lenin. If you dodge the bullets he is firing, it will be because of his own limitations, his nerdy and abstruse personality, the fact that despite his attempts to hide it, he is the kind of man who is ill at ease with people. The next demagogue may be the man Toma Jansky wishes he was, better able to psychologically connect with people, closer in personality to the average man, who will follow the path he trod to even more destructive ends.”

Jansky thought about responding with “who wrote that speech,” but thought a dignified silence would look better. Someone in the council should have the chance to respond first.

Linov turned and looked straight at Jansky, scowling and motioning toward the door. “You may go,” he said.

Jansky turned to the council. “I do not get a chance to respond to that?”

“We’ve heard enough from you,” Linov said.

Jansky did not react and after a few seconds of silence, Artur Savel spoke up. “The man should get a chance to speak in his defense. Basic fairness,” he said in a flat and neutral tone. Linov appeared momentarily filled with terror. But he quickly regained composure and smiled, looking to Jansky.

“Alright,” Linov said contemptuously. “Defend yourself.”

Jansky turned to the council and thought for a second before speaking. “I have never claimed that I predicted July 11. To the accusation of being a nerd, I can only look to him and ask: ‘when have I ever denied it?’ In any case, I fail to see the relevance of my own personality. I am not asking you for any position of power for myself. I am not asking to manage your company, attend your dinner party, or marry your daughter. All I ask is that you do what’s best for the people of this ghetto. The President spoke of a coup. Is it a coup when the Pillar Council does what it is legally entitled to do? To elect as President someone who isn’t the son of the previous President? That’s not what I learned in high school. The Nazis set up the pillar council system rather than a system of absolute monarchy. This was not because they loved us, but to prevent these kinds of crises from arising. Crises that could harm both them and us. You can end this crisis today.”

For a second, there was silence and worried looks from the council members. Some looked to Linov, but his facial expression indicated he did not think he needed to respond to Jansky. After a second, Yumatov calmly stood up. He looked tired but composed. “I move for an immediate vote on the following motion. The Pillar Council of the North Kyiv Ghetto recommends to President Anton Linov that he immediately resign for reasons of ill-health,” Yumatov said.

“No, no,” said Linov in an annoyed tone. “We have a *debate*. We don’t immediately go to a vote.”

“We’ve been debating for the past three hours,” Yumatov replied. “It is my opinion that everything that needs to be said has been said.”

“I second the motion,” said Konstantin Protsenko.

“Thirded,” said Shishov Yakovich.

Anton Linov’s look of annoyance gave way to anger. Pillar Councilmen have very little official power. Policy is in the hands of the President; they can vote on resolutions, but the only action they can force on the President is his removal. But two councilmen can force the council to meet and three can force it to vote.

“Fine, I’m a man of the law,” Linov said in a tone that seemed to indicate one should not take the statement too seriously. He paused and looked from one end of the table to another. “Raise your hands if you support Yumatov’s motion.”

Yumatov, Protsenko, and Yakovich raised their hands. After a few seconds, Roman Shvets raised his hand. A second later, he was joined by Vladimir Averin. At that point, Jansky’s eyes turned to Yuri Maslak and Yana Kobzar, who together could turn five votes into seven. Yumatov had told Jansky it would be impossible for Maslak to vote against the motion; Jansky was not so sure. His “whole persona” commanded him to do it, Yumatov had said. Not doing so would “destroy” his credibility. After what Jansky would have guessed was thirty seconds, Maslak raised his hand. The eyes of the table turned to Yana Kobzar. Would she leave it at six versus six? Legally speaking, a resolution that got six votes was identical to one that received five. But it signaled a crisis come the president’s death. If seven cannot agree on a successor, the choice goes to the Kripo, who may elect to replace the entire “dysfunctional” council with princes from other ghettos.

But instead of Yana Kobzar, the raised hand came from across the table. While all others had raised their hands quickly, Artur Savel’s hand went up at a leisurely pace. He looked to Linov with the same blank policeman’s stare.

Jansky felt a rush of happiness and relief but told himself not to show it. There was still the question of whether Linov would ask the remaining members to raise their hands if they opposed the motion. And then there was the question of whether he would resign or force a vote to formally depose.

Linov looked horrified. “This is the world you want to live in?” he asked.

There were several seconds of silence. The five loyalists, or potential loyalists, looked disappointed, but none looked like they were baying for blood. All hands were still up, and they still had a chance to raise theirs, but none looked ready to do so. Jansky thought they were communicating to Linov that he should accept the motion and resign voluntarily. The council must always present a united face to the Nazis.

After a few moments of icy silence, Artur Savel slowly rose from his chair and looked at Linov. “My President,” Savel said. “I strongly recommend that you accept the motion and accompany me to visit the Kripo. On my honor as a policeman, you will continue to be protected. There will be peace in the ghetto. I do not want to go down there and tell them we deposed you against your will,” he said.

Linov began to cry for a few seconds, something that some council

members found shocking. He wiped the tears off his face and looked filled with anger. He looked from one end of the table to the other but deliberately avoided looking at Savel. Jansky thought he was searching his mind for what to say. When he did speak, his voice was calm. “You will wind up like the Mensheviks,” he said. He turned to Savel. “Let us go.”

Savel stood up and led the way out the door, with Linov slowly following behind. As the door closed, Jansky forced himself to suppress his glee. He turned around and looked at the council members, attempting a somber and deferential look. “I know that was not an easy decision, but it was the right one. You have done right by your people. I should get going now, as I want to spend time with my family.”

He then turned and walked out the door himself, mindful of the fact that he was not “one of them,” and it would not look good for him to try to pall around with them as equals. He went home and told Nora what had happened.

Toma Jansky hoped he could sleep like a baby on the night of May 24-25, 2097. Instead, his sleep was filled with nightmares. But he was elated when the alarm clock woke him up, and his cloudy mind grew sharp again. He climbed out of bed, careful not to wake Nora, and walked to the walk-in closet he used as an office. He navigated to the pillar’s official website, a rarely-visited repository for pillar regulations. At the top of the page was the same note it had published yesterday. “Anton Linov, President of the North Kyiv Ghetto’s Pillar Council, has resigned on account of ill-health. Artur Savel, Chief of the North Kyiv Ghetto Police, has taken over as acting President.”

Jansky got out his phone. Eleven calls from people he knew, more from people he didn’t. A recent advance in artificial intelligence allowed messages to be transcribed, not perfectly, but well enough to give the gist of them. Everyone wanted to know what was going on. There had been so much traffic to the pillar’s website that it had crashed for several hours the previous night. Naturally, people asked if the “ill-health” story was true. A rational observer, knowing only public information, would conclude it was. Anton Linov was sixty-one. While most men live to age sixty-one without severe health crises, about ten percent do not. Whereas the prior for a so-called “pillar coup” should be lower, maybe one percent. Sometimes rational methods lead to the wrong answer.

But this would only be the case temporarily. Once Ravkov was elected, the rational conclusion would be that he was some kind of “compromise candidate.” While it wasn’t unheard of for Presidents to will their office to others out of meritocratic sentiment or simple hostility to their children, they told people they would do this many years in advance. It was therefore vital for Jansky to speak up at that moment, to preserve and enhance his reputation for prescience. But Yumatov strongly advised him against it, saying “investors” and the council members shouldn’t be spooked. Jansky didn’t think it rational to worry about “investors” as they were bound to learn the truth within a matter of hours anyway. But he was wary of spooking the

council members, who, after all, had not made the final decision to elect Ravkov. And Jansky didn't want to alienate Yumatov. If Ravkov was elected and appointed Jansky as an advisor, he would be one of the few who could credibly claim to have "privately" predicted it.

A few minutes later, Nora came out of the bedroom and started making breakfast for the two, chicken and rice soup. The children, thankfully, were still asleep.

"As I was reading that website," Toma said, "I got an idea for a financial scheme."

"Do tell," Nora said.

"Well, who do you think manages the pillar's 'news' website?"

"Somebody's not-too-competent nephew?"

"Indeed. A man who probably doesn't take cyber-security very seriously."

Nora smiled, understanding where it was going.

"Ghetto's like ours have noticeably lower yields on G-bonds than Kharkov and Minsk. But suppose some news went out that not only the President but four council members had resigned? People would think there was something rotten in the ghetto and that the risk of default was higher. Bond prices would go down, and one could buy at the dip. The Nazis would likely raid the ghetto and kill people, but if all one cared about was his own pocketbook, he could probably get away with it."

"Wouldn't the Nazis go looking for those who made trades during that time?"

"Yes. But if confronted, you could say, no, it's not a coincidence, I bought the bonds because I know a guy who knows the guy who supposedly resigned, and I didn't believe a word of it."

Nora looked at him skeptically. "Wouldn't the Nazis impose some kind of windfall tax?"

"Perhaps," he said.

Nora shrugged. "Can you think of a comparable case in some other ghetto?"

Jansky thought about it for a while, then said, "no, I can't."

After they finished breakfast, Jansky got to work calling back all those who left messages after he turned off his phone for the night. He gave boilerplate answers and resisted the urge to give subtle hints he knew something was up.

At 8:07, he got a text from Yumatov. "Ravkov is here," it read. Here in the ghetto? Here in the Yamel Tower? Regardless, they would likely vote on him that morning. Yumatov had told him not to go to Yamel until after the election, but he got his suit and tie ready. The suit was black, the tie was red, the undershirt, and his skin, were white. On an occasion when he was widely being compared to Hitler, should he go for a different color scheme than red-white-black? No, he thought. When people looked him up on *Koppeln*, they saw him in red-white-black and would notice if he *wasn't* dressed in it.

At 10:34, he got another text from Yumatov. “Vote made. Heading to Kr.” “Kr” was a reference to the Kripo.

At 12:18, he got another text. “Kripo confirmed. Ravkov President. On bus to Yamel.” Jansky checked the pillar website and found nothing. But it would be there in a manner of minutes, he thought. He put on his business suit, told Nora the news, and headed down to the Yamel front room.

As soon as he entered, he found about fifteen policemen milling about the lobby. Many people worked in the tower above, and they couldn’t well close the lobby down. But there was just one non-cop sitting on one of the ten gray lobby couches that were normally full. Jansky decided to take a seat. Two policemen immediately walked over to him. The man seemingly in the lead was young and baby-faced but also tall and well-built. “What is your business here?” he asked in a harsh and hostile voice.

“My name is Toma Jansky,” he said. “I am a member of the Eugenics Board.”

“ID card,” the man said.

Jansky handed it over, and the man put it on top of his scanner. A second later, both men turned and walked away, leaving Jansky in peace.

Five minutes later, a group of policemen walked into the lobby, followed by Ravkov and every single council member. Savel stood next to Ravkov, and both looked proud and happy. Jansky stood up, looking naturally prominent surrounded by policemen in front of the entrance to the “main office.” Ravkov recognized him and signaled to him to join them.

Jansky joined the group, which waited for policemen to open the doors. Several policemen looked obviously nervous. This, Jansky thought, was not part of their daily routine.

Once they made their way in and exterior doors closed, Ravkov turned to face the group. Two Linov loyalists, Egor Belsky and Dubov Lukyo, looked dejected, while the others smiled or looked normal. Yuri Maslak seemed perfectly calm.

“Now,” Ravkov said. “I look forward to meeting all of you at our first council meeting tomorrow. For now, I must spend the rest of the day settling in and organizing my family’s migration here. I bid you all farewell,” he said, then pointed to Jansky. “Come with me,” he said.

Jansky followed Ravkov, Savel, the two “bodyguards” from the train, and a policeman who looked about thirty years old. The young policeman seemed to have some kind of elite position, perhaps a close advisor to Savel. Ravkov looked around with wild eyes, almost like a child in a candy store. They approached the President’s office, which the young policeman opened.

Ravkov’s happy look gave way to confusion upon seeing what was inside. The room had been stripped bare except for portraits of the Presidents.

“Linov claimed as ‘family heirlooms’ everything that used to be in his office,” Savel said. “We could get it all back if you really want to.”

Ravkov scoffed. “Let him have it,” he said. “I’ll have replacements

ordered.” He looked down at an empty wall socket. “Even took the extension cords?”

“Yes,” Savel said.

Jansky tried hard to suppress his delight at the situation.

The young policeman got out his phone. “Joseph,” he said, “get us a spare desk and some chairs for the President’s office.”

Ravkov turned to the policeman and then to Jansky. “Have you two met?”

“No,” Jansky said, reaching forward to shake the man’s hand.

“Hello, I am Shura Gurkin,” the man said. “Police liaison to the President.”

“You served under Linov?”

“Yes,” Gurkin said.

“But don’t worry,” Savel said. “He has no loyalty to Linov. He’s *my* lackey.”

Everyone laughed, though Gurkin did so uneasily.

“Well,” Jansky said, “I’m Toma Jansky.”

“Personal advisor to the President,” Ravkov said.

Gurkin and Savel looked surprised. Ravkov turned to them. “What? He’s clearly qualified for the job.”

“Yes he is,” Savel said.

“Well, I’m sure you guys both have lots of work to do,” Ravkov said, turning to Gurkin and Savel.

Savel shrugged. “There probably will be a bit more drunken mayhem tonight,” he said. “I’ll see you tomorrow.” He turned and walked out the door, followed quickly by Gurkin.

Ravkov made sure the door was locked and then turned to Jansky. For about a half-hour, they made small talk, discussing Ravkov’s hotel and the property market, frustrations with accounting and taxation. Some secretaries came in carrying two small wooden but padded blue chairs, and the two sat down. Conversing in a near-empty room with no food and drink and two rather small chairs was rather ironic. Every club and every penthouse in the ghetto would grant them access, but neither wanted to be anywhere else.

Suddenly, after talking about unimportant things, Ravkov changed tack. “I think I know most everything I need to,” he said.

You don’t, Jansky thought. He raised his eyebrow and didn’t say anything.

Ravkov looked at him and began speaking. “Taras Linov and his history, Maslak’s blackmail of Linov and the council. I know how Linov threatened you and your family to get you to ‘inform’ on Maslak, then did nothing when you started stabbing him in the back. I heard about the charity fundraiser; quite funny. It wasn’t just you that he subjected to impotent and empty threats.”

“What about the cancer diagnosis? Do you know if it’s real?”

He smiled. “I suppose I could override doctor-patient confidentiality if I really wanted to.”

Jansky raised his eyebrow again. “It would seem premature to declare the Linov family a spent force.”

“I agree,” Ravkov said. “The point I’m trying to make here is that none of this was particularly surprising. This kind of crap is more normal than you think. When you were in Berlin, you seemed embarrassed by your ghetto. It’s all par for the course.”

“Really,” Jansky said. He wondered if some Nazi academic had done a study on the matter, top-secret of course, but known to certain Nazi circles in Berlin and passed off to Ravkov. More likely was that life in the Reich Capital had gone to Ravkov’s head. Unlike top Nazis, he had no power to command the co-ethnics outside the capital but liked to imagine that he did. “Well, you do know more about this than me,” Jansky said.

Ravkov smiled. “Make your case that I should change my mind.”

“Alright,” Jansky said. “Our evolutionary environment was, compared to our present circumstances, an *unpredictably* violent place. Our world is held up by the threat of violence, but it’s such a *stable* and *predictable* violence that we often forget it’s there. The kind of unpredictable violence our ancestors were accustomed to is found only among children fighting in the alleyway. Nevertheless, our nature is such that we are attracted to stories of violence, stories of violence long ago, and stories of violence in places inaccessible to us. That’s why all these rumors about the “coup” are being invented and spread now. But by and large, the world does not work that way. The world of suits and ties and handshakes and never mixing Russian and German words, the world every child rolls their eyes at, that’s the world we live in. The Vice President of your firm is not scheming to have the President assassinated. The ghetto police don’t usually extort people. The owner of one candy shop is not trying to bomb his competitor. Even Kripo raids are rare, formalized occurrences. So why should we expect the people at the very top to behave like they do in the preteen fantasy? The “null hypothesis” should be that they are ‘just like us.’ So while the mediocrity principle should tell me that the situation in my pillar is common rather than unique, this time I think it is leading me astray.”

“Consider history,” Ravkov said. “Violent succession disputes in monarchical systems were common. Ours is basically a monarchical system with the council as a kind of ‘safety fuse.’ As to your observation that we don’t seem to behave like the rest of the system, there is accountability for the rest of the system in a way that there isn’t for us. The guy whose job it is to keep the lights on knows that no matter who wins the succession dispute, the guy’s gonna be mad at him if he fails to do his job. There’s accountability for him. For us, not so much?”

“There’s the Kripo,” Jansky said.

“Yes. And I bet they’ve heard of Toma Jansky. Have a file on you. People have reported things. But it’s unlikely they’ll investigate. So long as Savel does his duty in arresting people they order him to arrest, they couldn’t care

less about us.”

“Do you think it’s that they want us to have this system, divide-and-rule style?”

“Perhaps,” Ravkov said. “I think they wanted divide and rule in 1980. But now, they don’t fear us and wouldn’t care if we were wholly united and of one mind. But they only have so many agents. With three million Russians here, millions of Americans there, and work outside the ghetto, friendships will form. Sometimes more than friendships. They can’t always trust the Americans to find and report them. To the best of my knowledge, that’s the main thing the Kripo men focus on. Both here and in Berlin.”

It was at that point that Jansky realized that Ravkov’s talk about violence might not be so theoretical. Did he intend to use it? He tried to suppress his nervousness but was unsuccessful.

Ravkov smiled. “Relax,” he said. “I ain’t gonna be the guy to throw the first punch,” he said.

And if I were, I wouldn’t tell you about it, Jansky imagined him thinking.

Jansky smiled. “You know, to me, Nazism was always something one learned about through books. They don’t, of course, talk to us.”

“Myself as well,” Ravkov said. “And it has remained so. Some in Berlin claim that they pall around with top Nazis, and you can’t easily dismiss the claims the way you could in Kharkov or Voronezh. But I don’t believe it.”

“So what is your belief in violent succession disputes based on, apart from history?”

“We get a lot of exiles in our ghetto. They talk. That’s all I’ll say for now.”

Jansky was unsatisfied with the answer, and apparently it showed.

“I know what you are thinking,” Ravkov said. “That I am basing my views on vague, non-specific rumors. No. I have specific people in mind who have told specific stories. I have even known people who were born in Berlin who tell me they can never go back to their ghettos of origin lest their throat gets slit.”

Jansky was skeptical. Ravkov had every incentive to make the stakes seem higher than they were so that Jansky would cling to him and feel dependent on his protection.

“Anyway,” Ravkov said, “let’s switch to another topic. You have some ideas about the productivization mandate?”

Jansky felt relieved at the change of topic. “Yes. We need to make clear to the medical establishment that we will not tolerate false ‘infertility’ exemptions.”

“A non-problem.”

“Even if you think so, the fear that doctors will be corrupt can undermine faith in the pillar. Ghosts are not real. Yet the fear they induce in children can be very real indeed.”

“So what’s your plan?”

“First, we go to the council and get their sign-off. We find the highest-status doctors in the ghetto and bring them into a room. Much of the council, myself, and many high-up policemen are there. We show them a PowerPoint presentation pounding home the fact that we will not tolerate false exemptions from the productivization mandate. Then we take them on a tour of the jail. Afterward, we bring them back and do a second power point presentation, this time focusing on conditions in the concentration camps.”

“You want me to intimidate a bunch of high-status people?”

“Yes. If you are afraid of getting blamed, remember that the council, the police, and myself will be there.”

“Why not a simpler whispered threat-in-ear?”

“A public, undeniable threat is more credible.”

“Are we really telling them anything they do not know?”

“Knowledge is a funny thing,” Jansky said. “People can know something intellectually without knowing how it really *is*. Think about the boy who goes off to war after reading about it in history books and dime-store novels. He doesn’t really know it until he experiences it firsthand. The concentration camps have become mythologized and are not quite real. People grow up hearing, ‘the food, it’s worse than a KZ,’ and so on. We can’t have them tour the KZs, but we can have them tour the police station.”

Ravkov looked unconvinced. “I’ll consider doing it eventually.”

Jansky contemplated how he should respond.

Ravkov smiled. “I know you want to say something. Go ahead. It will be your job after all. Your pay period starts today.”

“When people say ‘eventually,’ they often mean ‘never.’”

Ravkov smiled and lowered his voice. “I know there will be plots against me. It’s hard to maintain a plot of twenty people over a period of years. People will get restless, say, ‘when are we going to act,’ ‘is this just a LARP,’ etc. So the plot leaders will be impatient and will activate the plot in a matter of months. When it occurs, I don’t want them to have any ammunition, so to speak.”

It made sense, Jansky thought. But it also made sense if the purpose was to calm Jansky while Ravkov intended to rule absentmindedly forever.

For the next hour, the two continued their conversation. Jansky told him about Yuri Maslak, Ivan Vinov, and the Glanzia Forum, mostly saying things that were already common knowledge. Then the two shook hands, and Jansky left. He’d move into an office close to Ravkov’s the following day.

That night, as Jansky was leaving, he ran into Yuri Maslak sitting on the couches in the Yamel Lobby, talking to a bald, middle-aged man. Maslak instantly stood up, said goodbye to his companion, and walked over to Jansky.

“Hello,” Maslak said in an insincere friendly voice.

“Hello to yourself,” Jansky said.

Maslak and Jansky then walked side by side, both smiling and feigning friendliness. They exited the building and found that the weather was quite

pleasant and there seemed to be more people on the street than usual.

“You know,” Maslak said, “That in the Russian Empire and many other European monarchies, they threw a giant public party whenever a new Tsar was coronated. Perhaps the last Tsar was stupid enough to believe all the peasants were out there because they loved him rather than to get free sausage and pretzels.”

“But the people here will spontaneously party?”

“Yes. For everyone who ever had a grudge against the lazy, nepotistic, and corrupt system feels the temptation to celebrate this day. Wishful thinking makes him hope the new man is different, even though deep down he knows the new boss is the same as the old boss.

“I’m sure he does,” Jansky said, rolling his eyes.

“Anyway,” Maslak said, “congratulations on your accomplishment.”

“Thank you.”

“Of course, it will be short-lived. Raskov will be invited to A.G. Club. You will not. He will be invited to the old-money cocktail parties. You will not. They will get all chummy with him and will ask him why he is hanging onto this loser named Jansky. But don’t worry, son, you did the ‘right’ thing.”

“I’m reminded of a quote from the great man,” Jansky said, referring to Hitler. He reached out into his pocket and got out a piece of paper. He unwrapped it and read it aloud. “‘Don’t forget how people laughed at me fifteen years ago when I declared that one day I would govern Germany. They laugh now, just as foolishly, when I declare that I shall remain in power – Adolf Hitler, 1934.’”

“Every significant Russian since 1970 has been compared to Hitler,” Maslak said. “Though more usually by his enemies.” Maslak paused and had a look of contemplation. “If you are Hitler, perhaps Raskov is Paul von Hindenburg?”

“And perhaps you are Papen or Hugenberg?”

Maslak looked insulted but soon regained his composure. Jansky thought he was about to turn and go when he reached out and shook Jansky’s hand uneasily. “Lest we leave here confused about our situation, I’ll just say that I do not hope to see you removed from ‘power.’ The reason is simple: I know the kind of man who would replace you. I hope you think about the kind of man who would replace me and whether that man would be more or less hostile to you.”

“I always think before I act,” Jansky said.

“Good.”

Chapter 20

The bag of flour in Toma Jansky’s kitchen featured an illustration of the never-ending wheat fields of Kansas. Quite likely, the wheat did originate there. The image on the bacon was of a prosperous rural farm, though it

probably came from the feedlots of South Ukraine, where animals were crammed together and fattened up on corn from Africa and India.

It was the mourning on Tuesday, May 28, and Jansky would soon head to Yamel for the second day of his job as Ravkov's advisor. He and Nora were trying their best at the leisurely celebration they had been denied over the past weekend. Bacon, fried eggs, and waffles made on a waffle iron Jansky had bought the previous Winter Aid day. Each wore shorts and a t-shirt, his black, hers gray.

Lida and Olya were eating oatmeal with artificial sweetener, each at a different-sized booster seat at the table. Jansky was not entirely secure in his position and couldn't afford to splurge on everyone. Oatmeal or cream of wheat was what they ate almost every morning, and they broached no objection to the inequality. Ivan, luckily enough, was asleep.

As Nora poured the batter into the waffle iron and pressed it down, she turned to Toma. "So, how many people are employed in the main office?"

"Ninety-three," Jansky said, "ninety-four if you count myself. The guy who got booted out of his office to make way for me is still on the payroll, as far as I know. I got info on the job title, pay rate, and working hours of all the employees. That was one of the first things I asked for yesterday, and I was impressed at how quickly I had a paper copy in my hands."

"Who are the workers?"

"There are three groups. One is the staff that guards and waits on the President. The second are those whose job is dealing with people who want to speak to the President. Usually, one can go to the police department, the education department, or whatever, but in cases where you've got a grudge against one or where two departments can't agree on jurisdiction, they send people to the main office. Those who receive these complaints and decide whether to pass them on to the President are ambitious, if not always competent. The third group is made up of women, all of whom got their jobs through marriage or family. They make sure there are donuts in the break room, ink and paper in the printers, etc. Most have children and work part-time. There seems to be a great deal of featherbedding in their jobs. I was told that an ambitious daughter-of-the-elite goes elsewhere, for her all doors are pretty much open except in the police department."

"This is where you think I should work?"

"Yes."

"I look forward to it," Nora said, smiling.

"Do you really?"

Nora looked surprised. "An easy job and more money, what's not to like?"

He looked at her, inviting her to say what he knew she would say. She was exceedingly happy about his "coup" but had to be wondering if she would fit in. If she found the people at Glanzia "fake," the people in the Main Office would be mannequins.

“I mean, I do wonder if the others will like me,” Nora said.

“I wouldn’t worry about it,” he said. “I have been told that the women’s social structure is based on the roles of their fathers, brothers, and husbands. The wife of a big-shot is a big-shot herself. When I walked through that office and met the employees, many spoke with a noticeable nervousness, as if I was there to lead a purge.”

“Must have been a nice feeling,” Nora said.

“It was.”

At that moment, they were interrupted by a knock on the door. Jansky considered ignoring it but decided he would at least look through the peephole. He knew that someone from the outside could look into the peephole, see the shadow he would make when he looked through, and know there was someone inside. Jansky looked and felt a combination of fear and annoyance when he saw a policeman’s uniform. But he was relieved as soon as he recognized the face. It was Artur Savel, alone. What did he want? Jansky opened the door.

Savel smiled. “Hello,” he said. “I didn’t have time to go down to Yamel yesterday and probably won’t today due to important police business. I wanted to talk to you, if only briefly.”

“Important police business?”

“Do not worry,” Savel said. “There’s no threat to the ghetto.”

Jansky had wondered why Savel hadn’t gone to Yamel the day before to kiss the ring of the new rulers. Perhaps he thought his absence would signal his power and importance.

“Come on in,” Jansky said as he opened the door.

“Thank you,” Savel said.

As Nora saw Savel, she went to wash her hands, then returned. They had cooked everything except for one last waffle but would delay eating for now. “Hello,” Nora said in a deferential tone. “I’m Nora Jansky.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Savel said. The two shook hands.

Toma looked to Lida and Olya, who had ignored Savel’s entrance. He clapped his hands gently. “Children,” he said.

They looked up, saw Savel, and knew the drill. They got down and assembled before him, then reached out to shake the man’s hand.

Savel looked honestly touched by the display, bending over to shake the children’s hands. He then turned back to the two adults

“Unfortunately,” Toma said, “we do not have enough food to share.” He hadn’t forgotten the conditions of his brief imprisonment and would only be so polite.

“No matter, I already ate,” Savel said, unsurprisingly.

“Could I at least get you some coffee?” Nora asked.

“Half a cup,” Savel said.

Nora got the coffee while the children climbed back onto their booster seats. Savel sat down at the table and faced them. Toma decided to sit down

with a plate of eggs and bacon. He did not eat anything and looked to Savel. “So,” Toma said, “what do the police think of the transition?”

Savel looked uneasily toward the kids, then to the kitchen, where Nora was waiting for the waffle iron to finish. Presumably, he was considering how much to say in their presence. “They don’t think a great deal about it,” Savel said. “If anything, they find it rather funny.”

The children did not react, nor did Nora. Toma wasn’t sure what he meant and let it show. “Why is it funny?”

Savel again looked to the children and Nora.

Toma decided to send his kids away. “Children,” he said in a stiff tone. “Go play with your coloring books. You can finish breakfast later.”

Lida did not look happy but could see that her father was serious. She and her sister climbed down and went to their room.

After Lida closed the door behind her, Toma turned to Savel. “I assume you came here for a more adult, ‘political’ discussion,” he said.

“You might say that,” Savel said.

“Good,” he said. “Anything you say to me, you can say in front of my wife.”

Savel looked at him skeptically. He was doing it for a reason. He wanted to signal he had people who could replace him at Raskov’s side were he to suffer any accidents or scandals. His wife was an obvious, though flawed, possibility. Nora left the waffle iron and walked over to the table.

“Well,” Savel said, “To answer the question of why police find it funny, I must explain what the majority of the pillar council thought of you until very recently. Do you want to know?”

“Sure,” he said.

Nora nodded.

“Really?” Savel asked. “People often say things behind a man’s back that they would never say to his face. You sure you want to know?”

Toma smiled. “I like to think I have a thick skin. Go ahead.”

“We thought you, Maslak, and your friends at the ‘Glanzia Forum’ were just a bunch of pompous, politically impotent nerds. We laughed at the fact that you thought we trusted and respected you because you weren’t getting stuffed into lockers anymore. We thought the notion of you having any impact on the decisions of the pillar council was, well, *funny*. Then Linov pulled that cancer stunt. You didn’t scare me, but you did scare him, made him shoot himself in the foot.”

Jansky smiled. There was probably some truth to what Savel said. The American adage “high school never ends” was largely true. But Savel had every reason to want Jansky to feel alienated from the council. Jansky was supposed to look at Savel as an outgroup member, Savel couldn’t pretend to be anything else, but at least one with the friendliness and decency to tell the excluded person the truth. He also wanted to undermine Jansky’s confidence, make himself seem like a valuable political advisor. An advisor to an advisor.

"Perhaps luck did play a part in all this," Jansky said. "Perhaps I was not the best 'political operative.' Perhaps I was a rank amateur. But I went up against a pinhead and I won. The takeaway from this story shouldn't be, 'this was all a fluke we should draw no conclusions from.' It should be 'it's a stupid idea to select your leaders on the basis of birth, as you might get someone so ineffectual that a bit of luck and a 'pompous' amateur can throw them out.'"

Savel laughed. "Well, Jansky, I'm sure when you reach the Presidency, you won't try and pass it on to your own children."

Jansky had a split-second decision to make. Previously it had been to his advantage to underestimate his ambitions. Now, if he wanted Savel to think he was a man who could intercede on his behalf with Ravkov, he ought to be someone with his eyes on the prize. "Well, we'll just have to wait and see," Jansky said in a half-sarcastic voice.

"Yes, we will," Savel said.

Jansky smiled.

"Anyway," Savel said. "The real reason I did not see Ravkov yesterday was that I want to keep my distance from this political stuff. I want you to know that if there is to be a political struggle, I have no desire to participate in it."

It was almost a promise, Jansky thought, but was, in fact, no such thing. All he said was that he wouldn't *want* to do it, not that he *wouldn't* do it.

Jansky smiled. Savel's fellow policeman apparently saw humor in the situation, and he did too. Acting on impulse, he stood up and raised his right hand in the air in a stiff-armed salute. "Lincoln was a Nazi," he said

Savel smiled, then stood up himself. He looked slightly above Jansky with an intense and devoted facial expression. His back stiffened and he raised his right arm slowly. With his Ghetto Police uniform, he could be far more "true to life."

"Lincoln was a Nazi!"